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CHAPTER XIV. AN AMATEUR DETECTIVE.



DICK THOMPSON went up to London, and passed the night at the Cathedral Hotel; and in the morning he rose early, took apartments in Bloomsbury, and then set out to make his first inquiries about his uncle. He called upon Mr. Paternoster, and the publisher shook hands with Dick, and said that he was very glad to see the young author.

"Would you kindly tell me whether my uncle sent you a manuscript last Thursday?" Dick inquired.

"No, he did not; but your father came here, and we made him an offer for the

novel which he submitted to us," Mr. Paternoster replied.

There was a short pause; and then the publisher asked if Dick had brought the manuscript, and was ready to accept two hundred and fifty pounds for the copyright.

"Unfortunately my father destroyed the manuscript directly he returned home," Dick replied.

"Then, if you will take my advice," the publisher said, "you will do your best to reproduce the work from any notes you possess, if you have not another copy of your story."

"But it was my uncle's novel, not mine," Dick answered at once; and this led to an explanation. Dick concealed nothing; and the publisher, who had been present at Philip Thompson's wedding, would not believe that the poet had been guilty either of bigamy or theft. As to the alderman's conduct, he would not express an opinion; but he told Dick that he thought a son should not in any case expose his father to punishment or contempt.

Dick then hurried off to Somerset House, and as he knew the date of the marriage, he had no difficulty in obtaining a certified copy of the register, which stated that a marriage had been solemnised at Trinity Church, in the parish of Haggerstone, in the county of

Middlesex, on the thirtieth day of June, eighteen hundred and fifty-five, between Philip Thompson, aged twenty-one, bachelor and gentleman, of 27, York Street, and Mary Smith, aged seventeen, spinster and milliner, of 28, York Street. The certified copy also showed that Philip Thompson was the son of Edward Thompson, auctioneer and estate agent, and that Mary Smith was the daughter of John Smith, carpenter, and that the marriage had been solemnized, according to the rites and ceremonies of the Established Church, after banns, by John Hollingshead, curate, in the presence of Samuel Soper and John Wilkinson.

This deprived Dick for a time of all hope of being able to prove his uncle's innocence; but then he thought that the milliner, Mary Smith—afterwards Thompson—might have died before his uncle's second marriage. Still, though he searched the index register carefully, he could find no record of the death of any Mary, wife of Philip Thompson; and when he looked at the register of Philip's marriage to Lily Montgomery, he was sorry to see that his uncle was again described as a bachelor.

Still he was loth to believe that the poet had committed a crime; he remembered that the witness to his grandfather's will had signed her name Mary Smith; and he began to search the index for the death of Mary Smith. The index gave the Christian names and surname, and the occupation of the deceased, and the time when and the place where the death occurred; but Dick only knew that Mary Smith was a milliner, that she was seventeen in 1855, and that her father was John Smith, a carpenter.

He looked through several volumes of the index before he came to a Mary Smith, whose occupation was given as a milliner, and whose age was seventeen in 1855; and then he found that the date of her death was earlier than that of his grandfather's will. Still, he entered the particulars on the form which had been given him, when he paid the shilling to make a search; and the attendant soon brought him the volume containing the register of the woman's death.

Dick learned that this Mary Smith committed suicide by drowning herself in Waddon Mill Pool, near Croydon, whilst suffering from temporary insanity, and that she was found drowned on the twenty-eighth day of September, eighteen hundred and fifty-five; she was a milliner, aged seventeen; and the information as to her death was given to the registrar by the coroner of the district.

Having obtained this information, Dick went to the reading-room of the British Museum. He obtained several newspapers which gave an account of the inquest, and in the *Surrey Observer* he read:—

"RECOVERY OF THE BODY OF A WOMAN."

"THE INQUEST."

"On Friday last an inquest was held at the 'Hare and Hounds,' Croydon, before Mr. Johnson, the coroner, on the body of Mary Smith, until lately a milliner's apprentice.

"The first witness was Mrs. Ann Adams, and she deposed that the deceased was said to be a former apprentice of hers, named Mary Smith, whom she last saw alive on the twenty-ninth of June. On that date Mary Smith ran away, and the witness heard nothing more about her until she was informed by the police that the woman was lying dead at the 'Hare and Hounds.' Mary Smith had been seen several times with Mr. Thompson, a cadet at the East India Company's Military College; and witness said that upon one occasion she spoke to her apprentice as a mother might to a daughter, and the girl promised to have nothing more to do with the young fellow."

"P. C. Stentiford stated that on the 28th inst., about two p.m., from information received, he walked to the Waddon Mill. There he saw the corpse of the deceased close to the side of the pond, which was deeper than usual in consequence of the late heavy rains. He noticed that the legs of the woman were tied together with a rope, which was secured to a post on the bank. From this he concluded that the deceased had deliberately committed suicide, as she must have purposely taken the rope there. After she had thrown herself in, with her feet so secured, she could not have got out again. He had the body removed immediately to an outhouse of the 'Hare and Hounds.'

"The coroner then remarked that, although

he was elected to his office less than a year ago, he had already sat on two young women who had been apprenticed to Mrs. Adams. In answer to questions from the coroner and jury-men, the constable stated that the woman took as many apprentices as she could obtain, and that she generally got rid of them within six months, although she never returned the premiums. The police had kept their eyes on her for a long time, but they were not prepared to bring a criminal charge. The face of the corpse was so much bruised that it would not be possible to identify the deceased; but if his suspicions were correct, this would be the seventh apprentice of Mrs. Adams's who had committed suicide at Croydon.

"John Willing, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., stated that he had made the post-mortem examination. He had come to the conclusion that the deceased had committed suicide, because

there was nothing over the mouth, and because the rope was tied to a post. She had probably secured the rope in order that her body might be found, or in order that it might not be crushed by the mill wheel.

"The coroner then addressed the jury, who found that the deceased committed suicide by drowning, whilst suffering from temporary insanity."

When Dick closed the bound newspaper volume, his mind was perplexed with vague doubts. He had noticed that the body of the woman, who had been found drowned, had not been identified, and he thought it possible that Mary

Smith might still be alive. He deemed it strange that Mary Smith and Samuel Soper should both be connected with his father; and then, whilst he was thinking of them, he remembered that it was his father and not his uncle who had been a cadet at Addiscombe, and his suspicions suddenly assumed a definite form.

The conclusion to which he had come was that his father had married Mary Smith; and when he had examined the Haggerstone parish register, and had seen the peculiar loop under the bridegroom's signature, he felt quite certain of his father's guilt. Dick remembered the publisher's words, and he did not deem himself the right person to punish the man who, he thought, was guilty; but he wanted to confide what he had learned to someone older than himself, and he determined to see his mother and ask her advice.



AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM READING ROOM.

CHAPTER XV.
A FIRST APPEARANCE.



LILY was feverish and excited when she reached her room, after having suffered much annoyance from Samuel Soper's attentions; but she was determined not to stay in her uncle's house, and she began to pack up at once; and when she was too tired to do any more, she thought of her father, and she thought of Dick, until at last she fell asleep. In the morning she felt weary and tired; but she had to dress quickly, in order to

be at the table punctually at half-past eight; and then she had to wait some time in the breakfast-room because the alderman, who insisted upon punctuality in others, came down late as usual.

The alderman looked angrily at Lily, when he entered the room; and his wife, too, sat down at the table without saying a word to her niece. The girl wished to tell them that she was going away, but she had not the courage to break the solemn silence; and she felt ashamed of herself, because she did not dare to mention that which she deemed it right to do. Two or three times she was about to speak, but she could not attract her uncle's attention; and he gobbled up his breakfast, and then hastened away to catch his train to the City.

Lily and her aunt remained at the table, though neither of them had any appetite; and, whilst the girl was waiting for an opportunity to tell her aunt that she was going away, the alderman's wife was afraid that Lily would reproach her for her apparent unkindness. After a long silence, Lily rose, kissed her aunt, and then frightened the poor lady by mentioning her plans for the future. The wretched wife could think of nothing but what her husband would say and do, when he returned home and learned that his niece was gone; and she declared that the alderman

would be very angry, and that Lily's departure was consequently impossible. But the little maiden would yield neither to entreaty nor to command; and she went upstairs to finish her packing, and then came downstairs to say good-bye.

Lily fetched the cab, which took her to the station, as her aunt told her that it would add to the alderman's displeasure if he supposed that his niece had received any assistance in her flight; and, as she took her place in a third-class railway carriage, she felt less miserable than when she was on her way to the alderman's house. She was determined to work for her living, and she hoped to obtain employment as a governess; but she had made up her mind to accept a place as a servant, rather than again submit to the degradation of being dependent upon her uncle's charity.

Mrs. Edwards was glad to see Lily, and she gave the little maiden a hearty welcome; but when the girl talked of going out to service, if she could obtain no other employment, the landlady shook her head.

"No, no," the kind-hearted woman said. "If you think you'll be more comfortable as a governess than you would be here, you can go, and you will always have this home to come to, if the people you are with don't treat you well; but as to your being a servant, it's not right that you should take the bread out of the mouths of those who were brought up to it, Miss Lily; and if you'd thought of the matter in that light you would never have proposed it, I know."

Lily had not considered this part of the question; but she urged that there were more governesses and companions in want of employment than there were servants who could not find places.



MRS. EDWARDS.



LILY OFTEN WENT OUT FOR HER KIND HOSTESS.

"That's all the more reason why you should stay with me," Mrs. Edwards replied. "Besides, when your father returns he is sure to come and look for you here."

Lily looked very sad, and the good-natured woman quickly continued, "I'm sorry to say that I've let your rooms to an actress, a quiet, well-conducted lady, who gives no trouble; but she shall have notice at once, and I can give you a bedroom at the top of the house until she goes. It's not the sort of room that I'd like to offer you, if I had another; but you won't mind just for a week, will you, Miss Lily?"

"If you send anyone away for me I won't stop a day," Lily answered, smiling. "I shall not even be able to pay you for the room at the top of the house; but you must let me help you with the housework, and do what I can to repay you for your kindness."

Mrs. Edwards remonstrated; but finding that Lily was determined, she allowed the girl to do a little dusting and sewing; and Lily, having something to do, had less time to fret over her loss.

Lily and the landlady had many little confidential chats together; and there were no secrets between them. Very few words were said about Dick, certainly; but the few were sufficient to explain all to Mrs. Edwards. As to Samuel Soper, at first they shed tears over the sorrows which he had caused Lily, though subsequently they laughed at his presumption and his folly; but before the little man's courtship was treated as a joke, the landlady had promised that the fellow should not be admitted into the house on any pretext whatever.

Lily had not been long in Keppel-street when she made the acquaintance of Miss Treherne, the actress, who was a pleasant woman of about forty. They soon became friends, and the actress and Lily often went out for a walk together, when the latter would do any little errands for her kind hostess. But Mrs. Edwards only allowed Lily to work to please herself; and as her duties were consequently light, she had plenty of time to spend with Miss Treherne.

The actress told Lily that she was playing the mother of the heroine in a drama at the Adelphi Theatre, and that she had to "understudy" the part of the heroine. She said that there were not any original scenes in the play, but that a considerable dramatic interest, sound morals, and sonorous phrases made it a success.

Lily listened attentively to the words of the actress, and then it occurred to the little maiden that she might make a living behind the footlights; but Miss Treherne tried to dissuade her young friend from making the attempt, and said that after twenty years' experience on the stage, in the provinces and in London, she had come to the conclusion that it was one of the most perilous and precarious vocations which a woman could adopt.

Miss Treherne, however, was glad to teach the little maiden the technicalities of her art;

and she found Lily an apt pupil. She showed the novice how to come upon the stage, how to stand, how to walk, and how to take a chair, and how to sit on it. She told Lily that success on the stage could only be obtained after years of waiting, spent in severe study; but in the girl's mind a theatrical life was surrounded by the halo of romance, and Lily thought she could easily realise a fortune on the stage. She was not avaricious; but she hoped that her father would return, and that she would have an opportunity of ministering to all his wants.

Lily studied the heroine's part, and went several times to the theatre with Mrs. Edwards to see the play. Then the actress gave the girl some more advanced lessons, teaching her how to fall, how to faint, and how to die upon the stage; and Lily studied diligently, and made such progress that Miss Treherne began to prophesy that her pupil would achieve success.

Though she was dazzled by the artificial glitter of the stage, Lily did not forget her father; and one day she went to Mr. Pater-noster to make inquiries. This kind gentleman told her that he had already seen her cousin, and gave her Dick's address; and for the first time in his life he falsified his account with an author. The result of this pious fraud was a balance of twenty-two pounds twelve and sixpence to the credit of her father; and this the publisher made her take. He told her that he would be able to find Philip Thompson some remunerative work, if the poet would only return; and he sent the little maiden happy away, by declaring that he believed in her father's innocence.

Lily was now able to pay Mrs. Edwards, but the girl had great difficulty in persuading the kind-hearted landlady to accept anything, and she could not induce the good woman to take more than the cost of her food.

That night, a little before twelve o'clock, the actress came up to Lily's bedroom at the top of the house. The little maiden had been asleep, but she rose to let in Miss Treherne.

"Well, Lily," the actress said sadly, "I have had my chance, and have thrown it away. After twenty years as an actress, I have played a leading part on the London stage for the first and last time. I am rather stout to play the heroine; and I believe I should have been hissed off the stage, if the manager had not appealed to the audience to overlook my shortcomings, as I had only taken the part, at a few minutes' notice, in consequence of the sudden illness of Mrs. Francis."

"I am very sorry for you," Lily answered, throwing her arms around the neck of the actress who had been so kind to her.

"You must not be sorry," Miss Treherne replied. "My failure has given you an opportunity which you might have waited years to obtain. I spoke to the manager about you, and told him you are letter-perfect in the part; and he has agreed to give you a trial tomorrow night, provided you satisfy him at rehearsal in the morning."

"But I shall be taking the part away from you, if the manager thinks I am good enough," Lily said.

"Oh, no!" Miss Treherne answered. "The manager knows his business too well to let me play the heroine, except as a stop-gap; and if you succeed, you will let me say that you were my pupil, and then I shall be able to give lessons to those who want to go upon the stage. I should like that ever so much better than what I am doing now, Lily, dear; so for selfish reasons, you see, I hope you will be successful." The actress kissed the girl, and smothered a sigh of regret, which would come as she thought of her own failure.

The next morning Lily and the actress were up early; and they went through their parts, before they started for the theatre. Lily felt very nervous, but Miss Treherne assured her that she would succeed; and when they reached the theatre the manager was very polite and kind to the novice. Through the ordeal of the rehearsal she passed satisfactorily; and the actors and actresses inspired her with confidence by praising her acting and doing their best to make her at home amongst them.

The manager told Lily that he would pay her one guinea for each performance, and Miss Treherne congratulated her pupil. They went together to a theatrical costume maker for the wedding-dress which was required, and then the actress took Lily to a shop in Oxford-street to buy two other dresses. Their shopping took them some time, but directly they reached home, Lily sat down to write to Dick to tell him that she had left Romford, and that she was to make her first appearance on the stage, at the Adelphi, that evening.

The heroine of "The Fatal Shot" is the only child of a wealthy country gentleman; but the villain appears upon the scene and claims the estate, stating that he is the son of the Squire's elder brother, who died abroad. The villain is willing to marry his cousin; but the heroine loves, and is loved by, the village doctor; and she only consents to marry the villain, when he has made her believe that her lover is false.

In the second act the heroine returns from church, married to the villain. The marriage has saved her parents from ruin; but she despises her husband, and she hates him when, in consequence of her refusing his caresses, he boasts of having deceived the poor woman to whom the doctor was only giving medical advice and charitable assistance. The heroine then determines to die; but, whilst she holds the revolver in her hand, her husband is shot from outside, and she in her alarm accidentally fires into the air. Her relations and friends rush in, the dying man accuses her of murder, and she is subsequently arrested.

All, however, is well that ends well. The murder was committed by the woman whom the villain had deceived in Scotland; and when she confesses on her death-bed, it appears that she was his legal wife,

according to the laws of that part of the realm. The heroine is released from custody; and the Squire, who has ascertained that the villain was an impostor, gives the hand of a happy bride to the lover who has always been faithful and true.

There was much applause, when the curtain fell; the actors and actresses were called upon to make their bows to the audience; and when Lily came before the curtain, bouquets of flowers were thrown to her, and the clapping of hands and the stamping of feet showed



THE HEROINE OF AN ADELPHI MELODRAMA.



LILY WAS CALLED BEFORE THE CURTAIN.

that her efforts to please had been appreciated.

Dick, who had been in the theatre, accompanied Lily and Miss Treherne to Keppel-street; and directly he was alone with his cousin, he told her that he was sorry she had appeared upon the stage. She listened patiently to his censure; and then he told her that he was making progress with his inquiries as to the charges which had been brought against her father. He did not give her much information, for he did not wish anyone to share the suspicion which he entertained; but she said that he would require funds for further investigations, and that nearly all the money which she could earn upon the stage should be spent in trying to prove her father's innocence.

CHAPTER XVI. A CASE OF ASSAULT.

DICK wrote to his mother; and two days after he had sent the letter he went down to Romford. He walked quickly from the station to

the house, and when he was told that his mother was not at home, he said he would go to her little room and wait until she returned. But the footman informed him that the alderman and Mrs. Thompson were out of town, and that they would not be back for some months.

Just then Dick heard his father speaking angrily, and soon afterwards the gentler tones of his mother's voice became audible. He did not hesitate a moment, but ran upstairs, and found his mother pleading with her husband to be allowed to see her son. She threw her arms around Dick's neck; and not until she had done this did she notice the alderman's scowling face, or think of the punishment which her brutal husband would be likely to inflict upon her, directly they were alone. When she remembered this, however, she shrank from her son, trembling with fear; and she looked at the alderman, and entreated him with her eyes for mercy. She had not dared to receive Dick without the knowledge of his father; and when she had given Dick's letter to her husband, in his rage he had cursed his son. The alderman had given the footman orders not to admit Dick; and in order to prevent the possibility of a meeting taking place, between mother and son, without his knowledge or consent, he had stayed away from the City for the day.

The alderman was amazed at the intrusion of his son; the Manor House was his, and Mrs. Thompson was his; and when he had separated mother and son, he looked as if he was as much surprised as annoyed at what he deemed the impudent violation of the sacred rights of property.

"Perhaps, young man, you will be good enough to tell us what you want here?" he demanded.

"I came to tell my mother that I have found out who was the husband of Mary Smith, and to let you know that you can still save yourself by a full confession, as all I want to do is to prove my uncle's innocence," Dick replied.

"You ungrateful hound!" the alderman exclaimed. "I have done for you what only one father in ten thousand can and will do for his son. I have given you the best education that money could buy; I was willing to let you step into a business that produces double the income of the Lord Chancellor; and because I won't let you marry a girl who has disgraced herself by going upon the stage, you are doing your best to ruin me."

"Lily has not disgraced herself," Dick replied.

"She came here to eat the bread of charity, but that was not good enough for her; and so she has gone away to feed on

that of shame, which is more to her taste," the alderman said, sneering unpleasantly.

"That is not true!" Dick answered.

"Now, you may go, sir, and never dare to enter my house again. As to my money, you shall never have a halfpenny of it; for I would have it buried with me, rather than you should profit by it. Take care, too, what you do; for if I hear of your slandering or libelling me, I will indict you, rogue and vagabond that you are!"

Dick crossed the room to where his mother was sitting, but the alderman would not allow his son to approach her.

"Don't put your hands on her," the alderman exclaimed. "Leave her alone; for she does not want to be polluted by an ungrateful fellow like you. A woman can't touch pi'ch without being defiled."

"You and I will meet soon enough for our own good; but I don't know when I shall see my mother again, and I will not leave her without saying good-bye," Dick replied.

"Dick, dear," the weak woman said, "I think you had better go away. It's never any use to oppose your father; for whoever tries to do that comes to a bad end. Two of his clerks started in business for themselves, but they failed, and all their hard-earned savings were swept away. Think of them, my dear boy, and give in; for no one gets the better of your father."

"My dear," said the alderman, "he is an ungrateful fellow; and of all faults, I consider ingratitude the worst. If it had not been for me, where would he be to-day? He would not be an Oxford honour-man, I'll answer for it. But as he is your son, my love, I'm willing to forgive him; and if he will give up playing the detective and writing mysterious letters, I will allow him a hundred a year, I will indeed!" As the alderman said this, he smiled so benignly that anyone, who had not seen him just before, might have thought, "What a good, amiable, generous man this is!"

Mrs. Thompson, who was hidden from her son by the portly body of her husband, urged Dick to accept his father's offer; but the young man was not deceived by the outward show of this perfect pattern of civic respectability, and he firmly declined, saying that he intended to pursue his inquiries, until he had fully established the innocence of his uncle.

"Very well, sir," said the alderman, "as you have business elsewhere, it would perhaps be as well if you

would deprive us of the benefit of your society."

"Good-bye, mother," Dick said, trying to pass his father.

"Now just you go along, or I'll have you put outside," the alderman said in a threatening tone, as he roughly pushed his son away.

"I am not as easily set aside as a will," Dick replied, determined not to leave his mother without kissing her.

The alderman was enraged by his son's words, and he tried to turn the young man out of the room; but Dick would not move until Mrs. Thompson asked him to go. Then he walked downstairs, followed by his father; and when they were both in the hall, the alderman told the footman that he was never to admit Dick again, if he did not wish to be discharged.

"I shall not trouble you again," Dick answered quietly, putting on his coat.

"Turn him out!" shouted the alderman, who could not brook this momentary delay.

The footman put his hand on Dick's shoulder; but the young man turned round and told the fellow to leave him alone.

"Put him out at once, or I'll discharge you," the alderman shouted; and the lackey tried to do what he was told. A struggle ensued; another manservant came to the assistance of the footman; and Mrs. Thompson, who had heard the noise, came downstairs. Then the alderman assisted the two men; and whilst Dick was being pushed towards the door, his umbrella touched the face of his mother, who had gone behind her son in order to speak to him.

Directly he knew that he had hurt her, he said how sorry he was, and kissed her; and he had left the house, when the alderman stopped him.

"Not so fast," said the auctioneer. "I'll teach you that you cannot strike your mother with impunity."

"I did not mean to hurt her," Dick answered.

"John," said the alderman to the footman, "go at once and fetch a policeman."

"You do not mean what you say, William?" his wife pleaded.

"I do, my love," he replied.

"This fellow shall suffer for his crime."

"Please, William," the poor wife urged, "let him go, and say no more about it. A little piece of sticking-plaster will make it all right."

"You may have a black eye, my darling," the alderman replied, "and I am not going to let the villain escape."

"He is not a villain, William; and if you had allowed me to see him alone, this would not have happened," the mother answered, finding courage to speak in defence of her only child.



JOHN TREVOR.

The footman then returned with a policeman, and the alderman charged his son with assault.

Dick tried to comfort his mother, who said that she would never be happy again until this quarrel was at an end ; and then Dick told the constable that he was ready to go to the police-station.

On their arrival Dick was formally charged, and then removed to a cell ; but the sergeant did what he could to make his prisoner comfortable, and sent Dick a comfortable armchair in which to pass the night.

Whilst Dick was thinking how much more he would willingly suffer for Lily's sake, Mr. Alderman Thompson went up to town to consult Mr. Turner, the well-known solicitor who manages to appear in almost every criminal case of great public interest. The auctioneer gave his own account of what had taken place, and said that he did not want family matters, altogether unconnected with the assault, to be discussed, as he could not defend his brother's conduct ; and he left the solicitor's office, quite pleased, when he had been informed that the magistrates would refuse to go into any extraneous matter.

The alderman then called upon Mr. Chandler, a worthy merchant and justice of the peace ; and when he had said enough to bias this magistrate's judgment, he went to dine with his old friend and fellow-citizen, Mr. Joseph Cadbury, another magistrate for the liberty of Haverling-atte-Bower. To this gentleman he complained bitterly of his son's conduct ; and he said that if the young man did not soon become a reformed character, he would disinherit and disown Dick.

When the alderman returned home, Mrs. Thompson began at once to beg him to forgive Dick ; but this request only excited his anger, and he roughly told his wife that she would have to appear in the morning to prosecute her son. This, at first, she refused to do ; but, when the alderman threatened her, she gave way, and allowed him to place a large piece of black sticking-plaster over the little scratch.

Mr. Chandler and Mr. Cadbury were the two magistrates who sat the next morning to try Dick for assault, and Mr. Turner opened the case for the prosecutrix. He said that it was one of the worst cases which had come under his cognizance, though he had practised in the criminal courts for the last twenty years. Mrs. Thompson, he continued, was very loth to prosecute, but she was bound to do so, in order to obtain protection for the future.

" I will introduce," the solicitor said, " as

little extraneous matter as possible, but it is necessary for me to say that the prisoner has accused his father of the odious crime of bigamy, stating that Mr. Alderman Thompson was married in 1855 to one Mary Smith, a milliner. I have, however, obtained a certificate of the marriage of this Mary Smith, and it appears that Philip, and not William Thompson, the father of the prisoner, was the man who contracted a marriage with the milliner. I have also obtained a certificate of the death of the same Mary Smith, and as she died before the date of Philip Thompson's second marriage, that gentleman was legally married to the sister of the prosecutrix.

" The prisoner has also what he considers a grievance against his father, but I shall show you that this is not a legitimate one. Mr. Alderman Thompson and his brother married two sisters, and the only issue of the two marriages are the prisoner and his cousin, Miss Lily Thompson, who is now one of the chief ornaments of the Adelphi Theatre.

Philip Thompson, after the death of his second wife, was in poor circumstances ; and the alderman, with his usual generosity, invited Miss Lily Thompson to stay with him permanently.

" The two young cousins unfortunately fell in love, and when the alderman and his wife objected to the union of persons who were doubly cousins, the prisoner became very violent. He left his comfortable home, and began to make inquiries, hoping to be able to show that our worthy alder-

man's life, before his marriage, was not without spot or blemish ; but your honours will be glad to hear that from this ordeal the civic father has emerged white as driven snow.

" No one likes accusations to be made against them which they can have no opportunity of rebutting, and you will not be astonished to hear that the worthy alderman was annoyed. Then the prisoner went as far as to make these accusations to his mother, and you will scarcely be surprised to learn that the worthy alderman was angry. At any rate, he ordered the footman not to admit his son ; and when the prisoner came down to Romford, he was told that his parents were ' not at home.' But the young man forced his way upstairs ; he calmly requested his father to confess his crimes ; and he refused to leave the house. The result was that he was put outside, and during the struggle which took place he struck his mother just under the eye, so that she was in great danger of losing her sight. We will be



THE CLERK WHOM THE ALDERMAN OFTEN EMPLOYED.

charitable, and say that it was done accidentally; but as the prisoner was doing what he had no right to do, this constitutes an assault."

John Trevor was then called. He stated: "I was told by Mr. Alderman Thompson not to admit the prisoner. When Mr. Richard Thompson came to the house, I said no one was at home; but the prisoner pushed by me and went upstairs. Afterwards I was told to put him out, and I helped to do so. The prisoner resisted, and the result was that Mrs. Thompson was struck by the umbrella which her son held in his hand. I also was hurt during the struggle."

On cross-examination, the witness admitted that the prisoner had his back turned towards his mother when he struck her.

Mrs. Thompson, who had not dared to remove the large piece of black sticking-plaster, was next sworn. She said, in answer to Mr. Turner, that she was struck by her son's umbrella; but she added that it was her fault more than his, because, whilst he was being pushed backwards, she went behind him in order to speak to him and to her husband. She stated that he had always been a kind and dutiful son to her, and that directly after the accident he had begged her pardon and received her forgiveness.

The magistrates' clerk now spoke to the gentlemen on the Bench, and then one of the magistrates asked Mr. Turner if, after the statement of his client, he proposed to go any further. The solicitor and the alderman both spoke to the poor woman for some time; but feeling safe in the presence of others, she shook her head, and refused to prosecute. Then Mr. Turner informed the magistrates that he proposed to abandon this charge of assault, but to go on with that preferred by John Trevor, the footman, who then repeated his evidence, and gave further particulars as to the slight injuries which he had suffered.

Dick, rising to open his defence, reminded the magistrates that the prosecutor, John Trevor, was ordered to put him out, and was the first to commence the struggle; and then, having made a short speech, he called his father as a witness.

Mr. Alderman Thompson said a few words to the solicitor, and then took the oath; but when Dick asked him if he had at any time known Mary Smith, a milliner, at Croydon, Mr. Turner objected to the question, saying that it was not relevant to the point whether the defendant had, or had not, assaulted John Trevor. The magistrates upheld the objection, and then Dick asked his father, "Did you try to prevent me saying good-bye to my mother?" But this question was also deemed irrelevant by the magistrates, and Dick

learned that he would be unable to obtain any information from his father.

Neither the solicitor for the prosecutor nor the defendant had anything more to say; and the magistrates retired with their clerk, who was a solicitor often employed by the alderman to collect rents and to evict the tenants of his small cottages. After an absence of about ten minutes the justices of the peace returned, and Mr. Chandler said they considered the assault proven, and fined the defendant five pounds and costs.

Dick then gave notice of appeal; but he was informed that the judgment of the magistrates could not be set aside by any higher tribunal.

Whilst the case was proceeding Mrs. Thompson had returned home, less afraid of the alderman than she had ever been before. She remembered that she owed duties to others as well as her husband, and these she resolved to perform; and she was determined that her son, whom she fondly loved, should not lead a life of misery and want. Her husband had often wronged her, and she had always submitted to his every wish and caprice; but at last he had demanded that she should wrong her son, and she had refused to obey him. She took off the large piece of sticking-plaster, which, though not connected in any way with the assault upon the footman, had influenced the judgment of the magistrates; and her honest nature and her maternal love rebelled against this odious deceit.

Little by little her love for her husband oozed away; but she thought of her own faults, and was then ready to forgive and to be forgiven. She resolved to lead a nobler life in future, and she was ready to be an affectionate and submissive wife, if William would deserve her affection, and employ love instead of force to compel submission. She made up her mind that if he struck her again she would leave him and go to her son; but in any case she would receive the income of her father's estate, to which she was personally entitled, and share it with Dick, and with her son's wife, if her boy chose to marry.

Her husband stayed away until it was late, and then returned, determined to wreak his vengeance upon the weak woman. But she walked up to him boldly, and rested a hand on his shoulder; and then, speaking to him of the need there was of turning over a new leaf of the book of life, she proposed that they should do this at once and together. The alderman forced an unpleasant laugh, and was about to strike his wife, but she told him that if he laid his hand upon her in the way of unkindness, she would seek the protection of her son in the morning. The words and look of determination alarmed the alderman, and for the first time in many years he did not allow himself the satisfaction of venturing his ill-humour upon the poor woman, whose



THE ALDERMAN'S WIFE.

greatest offence and misfortune was to be his wife.

CHAPTER XVII. WANT AND WOE.

DICK THOMPSON was surprised and annoyed to find a sensational report of the proceedings before the Havering magistrates in the newspapers; and at first he was afraid to go to Lily. He lingered long on the way to her whom he loved with the heart-whole devotion of youth; but she welcomed him kindly, and neither blamed nor misjudged him. He required someone to guide and comfort him, now that he had suffered shame and disgrace; and once more her dear face smiled upon him, and her sweet voice spoke to him, and she sympathised with him in his sorrow.

Lily was very happy whilst her cousin remained with her; and she began to feel that she loved him more than she did her absent father, though she struggled hard to repress both her love for the youth and her knowledge of the fact. She wished to ignore love's influence, if she could not banish love altogether from her heart; but the little traitor would neither be driven into exile, nor allow his presence to remain unheeded.

The merry maiden banished gloom and sorrow when Dick came to visit her, and every day he paid her at least one short visit. At other times she was sad at heart, thinking of her father, all alone, weak, and weary of life; but when her cousin was by her side the little actress played the part of the queen of mirth.

Dick no longer entertained a high opinion of his own merits; and he spoke despondently about himself and mankind generally. He told Lily that he was altogether unworthy of her, and that he could never deserve the love of the best and purest creature in the world; and he said that he had no right to blame her for going upon the stage, as he was only one of Nature's failures.

The boarders where he lived looked at him askance, and he gave notice to leave; but his money was now almost exhausted, and he would accept nothing from Lily, because he was afraid that all his inquiries would be of no avail. He passed much of his time at the library of the British Museum, either writing a comedy which he had commenced at Oxford, or looking through the newspapers to see if he could find any further clue to assist him in proving his uncle's innocence. But his searches did not lead to any good result; and

when the notice which he had given to the proprietress expired, he had to pawn his watch to obtain the money to pay the bill. He had sent some short tales to the magazines, but some of these had been returned with thanks, and of the rest he had heard nothing.

He went away from Upper Bedford-place, and took a little attic bedroom in Guildford-street for three-and-sixpence a week; and then he gave notice of his change of address to the Bloomsbury post-office, hoping still—though somewhat despondent—that some of the editors to which he had forwarded short stories, would send him favourable replies. He felt that he was sinking in the world; and often, as he looked, without disdain, at some of the shabby-genteel readers in the British Museum reading-room, he wondered whether any one of them had once

been a young gentleman of talent, unappreciated, like himself.

One day, when he went to visit Lily, she told him that a letter had been addressed to her father. Dick advised her to read it, and Lily reluctantly opened the envelope. This contained an angry letter from the woman who called herself Philip Thompson's wife, and it was signed Mary Smith. The writer accused Philip of deserting her, of leaving her to lead a life of misery and toil, and of abstaining from doing what he could to redeem the past. She repeated that she was ready to forgive him, and to go through the ceremony of marriage with him again, so that no one

would suspect him of having committed bigamy; but she demanded that he should make no more delay, as otherwise she would be forced to take proceedings against him, in spite of the natural love and affection of a wife.

From this letter Dick learned the woman's address, and he determined to see the nurse. He told Lily of his intention, and the girl thought that this would be a wise step to take, though she believed that the woman was an impostor; but Dick was surprised to find that Mary Smith was working for her living, and he now began to doubt the accuracy of the deduction which he had drawn from the facts formerly before him.

Dick went to the hospital, and saw the nurse; and the woman was very polite to him, and answered all his questions. She was quite certain that it was Philip Thompson whom she had married, and she knew that he was a poet, and she produced the certificate of marriage and some verses which Dick had seen before in a



DICK'S STORIES WERE REJECTED.

volume of his uncle's earlier poems. He was convinced that the nurse had been deceived and deserted by his uncle, but begged her not to take any proceedings against her husband, because the innocent would suffer for the guilty; and whilst he spoke the woman's eyes looked sadly at his, and she listened attentively to all he urged.

"I will think the matter over," she answered, "but I cannot promise you anything now; and you must remember that a deserted wife has to look after her own interest, as there is no one who cares for her."

She rose from her seat, and Dick went away without hope of success.

He returned on foot to his little attic in Bloomsbury, tired and hungry: he had taken nothing since his breakfast, and then only a little bread and butter and a cup of tea; and he had to pawn his watch-chain before he could buy something to eat.

He wrote to Mr. Paternoster, and asked the publisher's opinions about the short tales which that gentleman had seen; but the publisher had formed an unfavourable opinion of Dick, who, he thought, should not have attacked his father, and a clerk was ordered to write a curt answer to Dick's letter.

The young author had not expected an unfavourable reply; but still he did not even now lose all hope of succeeding in the literary arena. The newspapers complained that there were no comedy writers, and promised substantial rewards to anyone who could write a good original comedy. Dick fancied that he had been successful in doing this; and when he had given his manuscript the last finishing touch with the pen, he obtained permission to submit it to the lessees of the Haymarket Theatre, and then sent it to them in a registered envelope.

A month passed, and almost all Dick's wearing apparel was in pawn, and still he did not hear from the lessees of the theatre. Then he wrote to them, and they replied that his manuscript had been mislaid. He had gone without sufficient food, making a light breakfast, and taking only a brown roll and butter in the middle of the day at the British Museum refreshment-room; and every morning and every evening he had buoyed himself up with the hope that the good news would come by the next post.

He now applied for a classical mastership at the Commercial Travellers' School, which was vacant; and as there was no other first-class honour-man in competition with him, he expected to obtain the post. But his application was one of the first to be rejected; six other candidates were selected, as fitted for the position, and one of these was afterwards duly appointed.

Dick called to see the senior mathematical master, a college friend of his, who had taken a first-class in mathematics at Oxford; and this gentleman, who was Dick's senior by some years, deemed it his duty, as a clergyman of the Church of England, to lecture the young man on his past conduct. The reverend

gentleman said that a son who had tried to bring disgrace upon his own father, a most highly respected alderman of the City of London, could not expect to obtain a responsible position in such an institution as the Commercial Travellers' School. The master had occasionally borrowed money from Dick, when they were both at Oxford; and he spoke kindly and compassionately, though he severely censured Dick's conduct, and advised the young man to go at once and ask for his father's forgiveness.

This advice was not pleasant to Dick; but now, believing that he had been misled by his conviction that his uncle was innocent, he felt that it was the right course to pursue; and he thanked the friend who had spoken so plainly to him, and went to the office in the City, where the great firm of Thompson and Company transacted their business. Humbly and quietly he owned that he had done wrong, and asked for his father's forgiveness; but the alderman, who had noticed the hungry, careworn look of his son, replied at once, contemptuously, "You have returned because you could not make a livelihood, either honestly or otherwise. But I have disowned and disinherited you, and neither I nor your mother ever wish to see you again."

Dick then left the office and walked slowly westward, wondering what would become of him, now that he had nothing more that he could pawn. He went to the British Museum library, but he did not write; he was hungry and cold, and it was warm there; and he could sit and rest. At seven o'clock he had to leave, and then he wandered about the streets, thinking how he could honourably gain a few pence with which to allay the pain which warned him of his need of food.

He was proud still in his poverty, and he would not accept alms from his cousin. He



THE STAGE-MANAGER RETURNED DICK'S MANUSCRIPT.

believed that her father was guilty, and he did not think he had a right to go to her without telling her this; and he knew that such a statement would cause her much pain, without doing any good.

When the people were coming out of the theatres, he was near the door of the Princess's, and he saw two ladies trying to find a cab. He raised his hat, and asked if he might find one for them, and they gladly accepted his offer. He engaged a cab for them, and saw them safely in, and shut the door for them, hoping that they would give him something for his service; but they only thanked him. Dick sighed, when the cabman drove away; he was willing to work, but he could not beg for his reward.

He walked back to Bloomsbury, wishing he had a pipe of tobacco to deaden the pain, which was useless to him, as he could not satisfy his craving for food. With difficulty he mounted the stairs to his attic, and then he noticed the bill upon the chest of drawers, and remembered that on the morrow he would be homeless as well as penniless. He went to bed, but he could not sleep; and when he rose in the morning, he looked haggard and older.

He told the landlady that he could not pay his bill, and offered her his empty trunk; and as this was worth more than the sum he owed, she was glad to get rid of so poor a tenant upon such good terms. He passed the day at the British Museum, suffering much pain; and he was weak, giddy, and feverish. He could not read the book before his eyes; and when he had to leave the building, he could scarcely walk.

Still, he managed to reach the Haymarket Theatre; and he went in, to ask if the lessees had found his manuscript. The performance had not commenced, and the stage-manager saw Dick; and this gentleman said he had found the comedy, but as he did not know when he would have time to read the manuscript, he would return it at once.

Dick took the manuscript, and staggered away like one drunk. His last hope had failed him; and his head seemed on fire, his eyes could not see plainly, and his mouth was parched with thirst. At a fountain, that he passed, he obtained some water; and then for a little while he felt better.

Slowly he made his way back towards Bloomsbury; and he passed the British Museum, and walked along Montague-street to Russell-square, thinking of his comedy, which he believed was a good one. The fever had now increased; and he knew that he would be overtaken by death, if he did not at once find shelter and food. His limbs were stiff and weak; and he now endured cold and

hunger, and all the pangs of want and fever which the homeless poor must bear.

Incidents of the most trivial nature which had occurred in childhood, and remained forgotten until this time, suddenly returned to his memory; and then he thought of the work which his mind might still accomplish, if only he were not doomed to die in the streets for the want of a pennyworth of bread. He wandered on and on, thinking of what he might do in the future for the poor, whose sufferings he could now for the first time fairly estimate; and at last he determined to sacrifice his pride.

The house in Keppel-street, where Lily lived, was close by; and thither he went, ready to accept alms from the girl whom he loved. In his semi-conscious state, he doubted whether she, too, would not fail him in his hour of need,

as all others had; but he went on, nevertheless, and knocked at the door. A new servant answered, and refused to admit him; the girl thought that he was drunk; and she told him that Miss Thompson and Miss Treherne would not be back for at least another hour.

He walked a few steps away, but he soon returned to the house, and sat down close to the door. A strange numbness deprived his limbs of the power to move; faintness and a feeling of languor overcame him; he no longer shivered with cold or felt the pangs of hunger; and he only knew that sleep was stealing upon him, and that pain was gone. He had no desire to resist the soothing comforter; he sank down, and stretched himself out on the stones; and then he closed his weary eyes, and knew no more.

There he lay unconscious until, an hour later, a cab drove up to the house. A light rain was falling, and the night was dark. But Miss Treherne noticed Dick, and mistaking him for a drunken man, she warned her companion to keep away from the prostrate form. Lily, however,

stooped down to see what was the matter with the unfortunate man, and she started back with a loud cry. She had recognised her cousin, and his face was so ghastly pale that she knew at once he was either ill or dead. She rang the bell vehemently, and then she took off her gloves and felt his forehead, and was glad to find that he was alive. The servant opened the door, and Lily and Miss Treherne carried the senseless form into the hall; and soon afterwards Mrs. Edwards helped them bear the unconscious body to the little sitting-room. Lily then attended to her cousin's comfort with all the skill and speed of her sex, and it was not long before Dick opened his eyes, and gazed at her in thankfulness.

"What was the matter with you, Dick?" she asked.



"NOT AT HOME, SIR."

He smiled a ghastly smile, and then replied : " I have had nothing to eat to-day, only a roll yesterday, and but little all the week."

Lily quickly brought him food, but the starving man had not now the strength to eat. He asked for a glass of warm milk, and this was given to him ; after drinking it he became excited, and spoke of his failure and of his suspicions ; and then for some time he lay still in a state of stupor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

N BONDAGE.

SAMUEL SOPER was tired of business, and he wished to retire into the country to pass the rest of his days, in the happy possession of a rustic cottage, three acres, and a cow. He had come to the conclusion that he would prefer a fine woman as his companion ; and one morning the little man made himself as spruce as any shopman in Regent-street, and then started off to gaze upon the charms of his ideal woman. This time he had to send up his card, for the nurse had not risen ; but she sent him a message to say that she would not keep him waiting long ; and when she had made her toilet, hastily though carefully, she came tripping down the stairs to greet her admirer.

Samuel Soper stated that she had the eyes of a gazelle, and paid her a few other compliments, equally delicate and original. He rattled on with his nonsense, until the nurse told him that Dick had called to see her ; and then she wanted to know if it was true that Philip Thompson was poor, and if the will which she had witnessed, deprived him of all his father's money.

" Of course," said Samuel Soper, speaking in a very low tone, " between ourselves, we know that the will was a forgery."

The hospital nurse looked at him in astonishment ; but the little man supposed that she did not care to hear him speak so plainly.

" Look here," he continued, " the cards have been shuffled since I saw you last ; and I know a game worth two of that you're playing. You needn't turn away your head, for my plans are as sound as the most matrimonial mother could desire ; and before you're many hours older, you will own that Samuel Soper is the best architect for the building-up of your fortune."

Mary Smith smiled sweetly upon the little man, and he proposed a day's outing to her ; and she, being anxious to obtain as much information as she could, accepted his invitation.

Samuel Soper was usually a stingy man ; but on this great occasion of his life he took a hansom to Waterloo Station, and gave the

driver two shillings, which was sixpence more than the man's legal fare ; and he bought first-class tickets to Richmond, and gave a shilling to the guard for locking the carriage door. In the gondola of the London streets, the little man had enjoyed the felicity of holding his charmer's hand ; and when the train started, he began to address her.

" My dear madam," he said, " I have fallen in love." As he spoke, he looked at her sheepishly ; for this swaggering slayer of hearts was still a little afraid of the massive object of his affections.

" If you fall in love you will find yourself in sorrow," she replied.

" If that is so," he replied, smiling, " I have only to marry to fall out again."

" If you marry," she continued in a light strain, " you will certainly fall out with a woman, but you cannot escape from misfortune."

" She will then be no longer Miss," Samuel Soper observed ; " and no one thinks ill of Fortune."

" The jade has done nothing for me," Miss Smith replied.

" Ah ! " exclaimed Samuel Soper, " but she will," and the little man pressed the hand of his massive companion to his lips.

" Sir ! " the lady exclaimed indignantly.

" My dear Miss Smith," Samuel Soper continued, " people say that I'm open ; and in getting to the seat of my affections without encountering any obstacles, you must have found me very much so. I hate reserve, and I should like to know what is the use of it, when the enemy has taken up her position right in the centre of one's anatomy. You have fired your eyes at me, and I'm so riddled with the shot that you can look clean through me. I can't hold out any longer, and so, without more ado, I ask you to accept my unconditional surrender. From this time forth, I am yours truly ; and if you will only cling to me, as some partners will to a bottled ace of trumps, Samuel Soper will be content."

" You seem to forget, sir, that I am a married woman," the lady said severely.

" Why, my dear madam," he replied, " you



THERE DICK LAY UNCONSCIOUS.

have already hinted that you consider the married state a marred one."

"Matrimony has certainly done very little for me," she said, sighing.

"That is all the more reason why Fortune and Hymen should have all their sweets in store for you. You can't eat your cake and have it too, you know," the little man observed.

"Though I have been unfortunate," she replied, "I can fully understand that, where there is mutual affection and a sympathetic feeling, no state of society can be more satisfactory than that of marriage. But I thought," she continued, "you brought me here to tell me something more important than this."

"There can be nothing more important to a poor bleeding heart than a piece of sticking-plaster to stop up its gaping wound; and for such a purpose I will employ you," Samuel Soper replied.

The nurse's answer to this generous offer was lost, as the train was entering Richmond Station; and the sudden application of the brake made the little man lose his balance, and threw him into the arms of his charmer. No damage, however, was caused by this collision; and the holiday-makers walked to the river-side, and there Samuel Soper hired a boat. He rowed a little while, but soon he became tired of this unwonted exercise.

"It's no use your playing a game against Philip Thompson," the little man said, when they were going down with the tide. "He's been as poor as a chapel mouse, ever since that forged will knocked all his fortune into an empty cocked hat. Neither of us could upset that will now; but, acting together, we could attack the alderman, and make him come to terms. Now you're a fine woman, and I'm a little man; and if we were rolled into one by the Church, we should make a very good couple."

"You seem to forget that I'm the wife of Philip Thompson," Mary Smith replied, smiling sweetly upon her admirer.

Samuel Soper laughed, and then said:

"How you could ever have mistaken the one brother for the other, I'm blowed if I can comprehend; but as sure as I'm sitting here, who was a witness to the marriage, it was the alderman with whom you mated."

The woman looked astonished; but she did not speak, as she wanted to learn as much as she could before she committed herself. Samuel Soper, however, now that he had broken the ice, was quite willing to plunge into the troubled waters.

"Now, as he has a wife living, he could not marry you again; so I propose that we enter into a league and covenant to get as much out of him as we can. That marriage of yours has been the making of me; it got me into the house of Thompson and Co.; it enabled me to become a partner in the firm; and now I propose to share my savings and myself with you. All you have to do, will be to marry me under a false name, so as not to commit bigamy; and when we have had the blessing of the Church, we'll get our straw from the alder-

man, make ourselves a snug little nest, and live together as happy as two turtle doves."

"You are a dear little man, certainly," the nurse replied. "But how do I know that you will not get tired of me, and desert me after a time? Man is a fickle creature."

"Samuel Soper is not a mean cad, by any manner of means," the little fellow replied. "How any person with the sense of a man could go away from such a fine figure-head of a woman as you, I'm at a loss to understand. But I'll tell you what I'll do; and if you don't say done, either you're not the noble creature I take you for, or else I'm a double Dutchman. I have ten thousand pounds of my own, and of that I'll give you five thousand. You shall have it in Consols, and I'll put it in your name, so that no one can touch it."

"I must have proof that it is there, and I must be quite certain that you cannot draw it out again, you dear little lover," he answered.

Samuel Soper did not altogether approve of this business-like shrewdness, and even a "dear little lover" did not quite take the harsh sound of the other words out of his ears; but he comforted himself with the reflection that, when she was his wife, she would look after his interests, whilst until then she was naturally bound to look after her own.

"You shall go with me to a stockbroker one day next week, and he shall buy the stock for you. I will pay for them, and you shall see them transferred to your name; and then I will go at once and have the banns put up under a false name."

To this arrangement Samuel Soper's charmer agreed; and she told him that she would be married under the name of Mary Morrison. Directly she had given her consent, the little man longed to throw his small arms around his massive Venus. In his ecstatic rapture, he was unmindful of other cockneys, likewise engaged in aquatic pursuits; and he was heedless of the danger to the little craft he steered. But though his goddess did not mind Samuel Soper calling her his little duck, she had a strong objection to taking to the water; and she bade the little man control his emotion, until they were alone in a place where the ebullition of their hearts would be fraught with less danger to their persons.

As a reward for his prompt obedience, she gave him her hand to kiss; but her lover was not content with the honour of pressing his mouth against her glove. He wanted to steal a kiss from her broad ruddy lips, to throw his arms around her massive form, and to feel that she was all his; and as his desires could not be accomplished whilst they floated upon the dangerous element which is fatal to so many cockney lovers, he took the sculls and rowed to the bank, and then engaged a man to tow the boat against the tide.

They returned safely to Richmond, and then Samuel Soper proposed that they should go and dine at the Star and Garter; but the hospital nurse had read in novels that actresses, countesses, and other improper persons frequented that famous hostelry; and she insisted

upon dining in a respectable, but not very tempting cookshop. Here they discovered some original maids of honour, and found them very nice and palatable; and Samuel Soper said some sweet things, whilst his Venus devoured tarts that were still sweeter.

The nurse allowed Samuel a second glass of wine, but she would not permit him to order a third, though he pleaded that he only wanted it in order to drink her health. She told him that, with all her long experience in a hospital, she had never known anybody cured of disease by wine or medicine taken by another, and that she had seen many persons laid up through drinking too much liquor to the health of their friends, and to the detriment of their own.

When they arrived at the station the little man was very thirsty, and he would have been glad of a glass of shandygaff; but his charmer had her eyes upon him, and he could not go to the refreshment room for this beverage of the oarsman, without failing in that courtesy which the chivalrous Samuel Soper considered due to the charming sex. Still, he again managed to secure an empty carriage; and directly the train moved out of the station, the little man pressed his lips against the ample mouth of his amorous fair, and extracted therefrom as much nectar as he could glean.

It is true that he could not satisfy his thirst, but that may have been excessive; for he complained that his heart was an active volcano, from which tons of fiery love were issuing forth. Mary now kissed the little man for the first time; and his bliss was so great that he at once said he would make the necessary arrangements on the morrow to enable him to buy the five thousand pounds' worth of Consols on the day after. He said, too, that the banns should be published on Sunday, and that they would be married on the following Monday fortnight.

He told her not to be surprised if he died of heart disease before the bridal day dawned, and he assured her that men, afflicted with an internal volcano, were liable to go off at any moment.

Therefore, Mary Smith modestly hinted that, for a pecuniary consideration, the Archbishop of Canterbury was willing to come to the assistance of impatient lovers; but the little man said there were difficulties in the way of a special license, as he had an objection to unnecessary affidavits. Then she bade him do his best to keep himself alive for her sake, if he valued her love; and he promised to be very careful, though he expressed his doubts as to the result.

The next morning, Samuel Soper went to the Guildhall library to refer to some law books; and he was not sorry to find that, though a marriage celebrated without due publication of banns is illegal, it is still bigamy, if one of the parties is already bound in wedlock at the time of the celebration. He did not propose, under any circumstances, to prosecute his charmer; but if his wife did not do exactly as he wished, he would dissolve the marriage and recover the five thousand pounds, given



"MY HEART IS AN ACTIVE VOLCANO, SENDING OUT TONS OF FIERY LOVE."

in consideration of matrimony. Love was not an overwhelming passion in the little man's breast, and he could consider his chances of connubial bliss as carefully as he could calculate the odds against an outsider for the Derby; but her form was perfect, and the result of his contemplation was favourable to the massive creature, entered for the matrimonial stakes.

The cunning fellow, longing to salute the woman of his choice as his bride, met her, as he had promised, upon the day appointed. He went with her to a stockbroker, whose name she chose at random in the directory, at the last moment, in order to avoid all chance of collusion between him and her little admirer; and the stock was purchased, and duly

transferred to her at the Bank of England. Then the banns of marriage were published at the Islington parish church; and a fortnight later she was quite ready for the little man, when he called to take her to church. There she gave her name as Mary Morrison, and stated that her deceased father was Edward Morrison, a stationer and newspaper vendor; and without any unnecessary delay, Mary Morrison and Samuel Soper were united in holy matrimony.

The bride and bridegroom had agreed to dine at the Star and Garter; for, now that she was married, the lady had no objection to be seen at that famous hotel.

At the hotel Samuel Soper ordered dinner for himself and his bride, and then they took a stroll in the park. The little man was pleased to see that people looked with admiration at the fine creature whom he had made his wife. Like most selfish men, he was proud of possessing anything which others desired, but could not obtain; and he valued the large diamond in the ring on his finger, not because it was beautiful, but because it was costly, and few persons could afford to buy so precious a gem.

The bridegroom would have been glad to remain in the most frequented walks; but the bride modestly sought retirement, as she wanted to talk over some serious matters with her husband. Hers was the stronger will, and the little man had to obey; but he did not yield until he could no longer resist without being rude to the woman he had so lately taken for better or worse.

"Samuel," she said, when they were alone. "you will not be angry with me, I hope, if I confess that I have deceived you."

"Samuel Soper is too sharp and sly to be deceived, my love," he replied.

"I have deceived you for all that," she said, smiling pleasantly. "You think I am Alderman Thompson's legal wife, but I am not."

"Then who are you?" he asked angrily.

"I am your wife now," she answered, patting him on the cheeks with her gloved hands, in a vain attempt to drive away his frowns. "But this morning I was simply Mary Morrison, spinster."

"You don't mean what you say," he retorted, glaring at her with his little eyes.

"Yes, I do," she said; "and now that you are my husband, I think it right to confess all. Mary Smith died twenty-five years ago; and, before she committed suicide, she gave me an introduction to the hospital, which she had received from her husband's father. I tried to persuade her not to do anything rash, and I advised her to force her husband to make her an allowance; but she loved the brute, and because he would not return the affection which she felt for him, she was determined to set him free. I ought to have had her arrested; but I was a wicked woman, and as I wanted the letter of introduction to the matron, I let her go to her destruction."

"Madam," the little man hissed through his teeth, "you have taken me in; and if you were not my wife, and consequently a lady, I should call you a swindler."

"You may call me a harder name than that, if you like, Samuel," she replied. "I have often blamed myself for the murder of Mary Thompson, and I know that I am nearly as guilty as if I had killed her."

"What is that to me!" he cried. "What I complain of is this, that I've been done, in spite of my confounded sharpness and slyness. I should not mind if you had committed a hundred murders, if I could only have you hanged. Here am I, bound to you for life; and my five thousand pounds are gone, clean as a whistle; and I never bargained for such a state of affairs, I can tell you."

"I thought you loved me a little," she said, sighing.

"So I did," he replied sternly. "If you had been married to someone else, we should have hit it off all right, I daresay; but a man with a wife of his own is like a cat with a brick tied round its neck, for neither of them can easily climb up in the world."

"I thought that as neither you nor I had lived good lives in the past, we might turn over a new leaf, and try to be better together," she urged.

"If I had married Lily, with her reversion to forty thousand pounds, I should have been ready to hear about a better life and to be bothered with the parson; but I did not expect these encumbrances with you, after all your little goings-on. You are a nice one to talk of a better life, you are!" he exclaimed.

"I wanted to punish Philip Thompson for ill-treating poor Mary Thompson, who I thought was his wife. I knew that her husband had beaten her, and had then deserted her in the time of her need. I blamed myself for her death, and I wished to punish the real offender; but then the devil tempted me, and made me think how pleasant it would be to have silks and satins, and to be able to do just what I liked, with no one to blame me."

"When you women do anything good, you take the praise, and call it an act of charity; but when you do what you shouldn't, you all put it down to the poor devil," Samuel Soper answered in his wrath.

"That is true," she replied humbly. "I am not a good woman, and I never was; but I will go to Miss Thompson, and confess all."

"And be prosecuted for your trouble, you blooming fool, you!" the little man exclaimed.

"You are angry with me, because I am not someone else's wife," she said. "You do not mind my not being a good woman; it's not that which makes you angry with me!"

"I never said it was, did I, you snivelling idiot?" Samuel Soper asked disdainfully.

"Mr. Soper," she said, "we had better part. I can go back to the hospital; for I said nothing about this marriage, as I feared you would not marry me in the end."

"And my five thousand pounds?" Samuel Soper asked, looking at her eagerly. If she would have given him back his money, he would not have cared much.

"I shall not touch either the capital or the interest, as long as you do not interfere with me," she answered. "If I were to lose my place, I should have to go to the bank and prove my identity; but if I were to do this now, it would soon be known at the hospital that I gave the authorities a false name when I entered as a probationer."

"You are a thief!" he cried.

"I cannot give you back the money," she said calmly. "If I did, and I were afterwards discharged from the hospital, I could not honestly earn my livelihood."

"What do I care whether you make your living honestly or not! I want my money!" he exclaimed, looking at her angrily, and trying to frighten her.

"Let us have no more of this," she said. "On your own confession, you are a forger; and if you attack me, I can retaliate. As it is, I intend to tell Philip Thompson's daughter all I know; but, as you are my husband, I shall make her promise that you shall not be prosecuted."

"Look here, Mary," he said quietly, and in as pleasant a tone as he could command, "if you go and confess, you are certain to be turned out of the hospital, whilst the jury will believe the alderman's oath and mine, against yours, any day. Why, you could not stand cross-examination two minutes, with your antecedents."

"If you are wise," she replied, "you will tell the truth and save yourself; for if you go into the witness-box for that wretch, even I would not save you."

"And you will, if I don't?" he said with some hesitation.

"Yes," she answered.

"You will ruin yourself, if you tell Lily Thompson," he said, slowly. "You will certainly be expelled from the hospital."

"In that case I shall nurse the poor, and I will distribute amongst them the interest of the money with which you proposed to purchase me body and soul," she replied. "You would never have used this fund so well, had it remained yours; and I shall be doing good in that way, and be working out my repentance before the world which knows of my past guilt."

"Cannot I persuade you?" he asked, trying to feign some love for her.

"No," she answered. "Your partner has made me the guilty woman that I am, and the time has come for him to suffer for his sins."

"Well," he said, "at least a wife will see that her husband is safe."

"Yes, if you will confess," she replied.

"I will turn Queen's evidence, if they will give me a chance," he answered.

"Very well," she said. "Good-bye."

He wanted to kiss her, but she did not wish for any token of his feigned love. She knew that she was a guilty woman, but he also had sinned, and he would not re-



"SAMUEL SOPER IS TOO SHARP AND SLY TO BE DECEIVED, MY LOVE."

pent. So they parted on their wedding-day, and each thought ill of that other whom each had taken to love and cherish through good and ill, until death should them part.

Mary Smith returned to town from Richmond, but Samuel Soper walked across the park, and took the train from Twickenham. He did not return to the hotel, for he had not given his address, and he knew that he would have had little satisfaction in

eating a good dinner alone, and less still when he saw the bill, and had to pay for two.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CONFESSION.

SAMUEL SOPER did not consider that he had acted with his usual sagacity in his matrimonial venture; and he thought that by flattery and cajolery he might have obtained the money invested in Consols, if he had not quarrelled with his wife so soon. In his own selfish way, moreover, he was fond of the fine woman whom he had married; and he made up his mind to captivate her affections again at the first opportunity. But as he might be called upon at any moment to give evidence against the alderman, he deemed it advisable to make his next campaign against his partner's pocket; and he entered the alderman's private room, on the day after his wedding, with the intention of getting as much money as he could, with as little delay as possible.

"I am tired of business cares and worries," he said immediately, knowing that it was of no use to take a zigzag course with his senior partner. "I want to revel in rural delights at Richmond, or some other of our country retreats, where a man can enjoy himself all the year long."

"Oh, you do, do you?" the alderman observed, without looking up from the account-book, in which he pretended to be interested.

"Yes," Samuel Soper answered in a determined tone, "and I want to capitalise my interest in the business."

"I think it was arranged that I could dissolve partnership at any time, without giving you any compensation. Do you remember?" the alderman asked, looking up at the little man.

"I only let you put that in the deed because I knew that you would never dare to exercise your right; and now I want twenty thousand down, and there's an end of the matter," said Samuel Soper.

"If that's an end of the matter, I am quite contented. You have got no money out of me, and you are not likely to do so in that way; but if it pleases you to imagine that you have been paid, all well and good," the alderman replied.

"Samuel Soper won't stand no humbug; and when I say the will was a forgery, and Mary Smith claims you as her husband, where will you be then, I should like to know!" the little man exclaimed.

"In that case I should be forced to make myself disagreeable, and to indict you both for conspiracy," the alderman answered.

"Don't you try on that little game, or you'll repent it, I can tell you," Samuel Soper said angrily.

"Strange, wasn't it," the little man continued, "that I should be the only witness to the will that you could find? Very strange indeed! But when I tell a jury at the Central

Criminal that there never was another, it won't seem so. As to your taking me into partnership, that was strange, too. I came to the office one day, soon after your marriage. I reminded you that I was a witness to the ceremony, and wanted a place. You told me to hold my tongue, and took me on as porter, though a blind man could have seen, with half an eye, that I wasn't fit for the work. Then there was the will affair; and directly after the forgery had turned out a success, you took me into partnership, though I certainly wasn't a very desirable partner. I had no nearer acquaintance with the art of writing and spelling than I had with the man in the moon. I studied a little when I was a partner in the great house of Thompson and Co.; but private lessons ain't done much for me, except in the matter of heathen mythology, to which I took a liking because the gods and goddesses went the pace that the mashers try to keep up nowadays. Still, I can't tot up a column of figures; and it's not very often that a porter jumps out of his own shoes into those of a partner, without having to come to the ground between whiles, either to act as a clerk, or to marry the guv'nor's daughter, like Dick Whittington and his cat. That was a good long jump of mine! beats the record, you bet!"

"Thank you," the alderman replied, "I am a respectable citizen of the City of London, and don't bet."

"Well, you may fork out twenty thousand, anyhow," Samuel Soper answered.

"Mr. Soper," said the alderman severely, "your language has a little touch of what, without great injustice to you, I might perhaps call slang. Please, do not let me hear any more of it, for such expressions grate upon my ears. I cannot bear anything horsey or fast in tone."

"Then just you throw up the sponge and hand over the stakes, or I'll give you a chance of preaching a sermon on style to the chaplain at Newgate," the little man threatened.

"My dear young friend, let us speak plainly, for lying is a deadly sin; and, between ourselves, there is no object to be gained in giving points to the devil. Now, what I want to tell you, in as pleasant a way as possible, is that if John Doe forges a legal document, and Richard Roe is a witness to that instrument, knowing that it has been forged, Richard Roe is likely to suffer for his wrong-doing as much as John Doe. If we take an extreme case, in which John Doe was actuated by the highest motives, when he committed forgery—for instance, if he wanted to prop up an honourable house, highly thought of in the City—whilst Richard Roe, who tempted John Doe to commit the crime, had only base and sordid motives for what he did: a merciful judge might deal leniently with the poor man who listened to the voice of the tempter, and bring down the sword of justice upon the head of the man who led a good Christian into the way of iniquity. I put my trust in a higher power, Samuel Soper, than those of this world; and when I consider

how much I have given away in charity, and what good I have done with the talents entrusted to me, I feel that there is a power upon which I may firmly rely."

The alderman looked upwards, as if heaven were visible on the office ceiling, and a benignant smile crept stealthily across his unctuous cheeks, whilst the whites of his eyes were to the fore; and this fact, coupled with the great man's holy appearance, would have convinced anyone, less suspicious than Samuel Soper, that a worthy soul was looking inwards and learning to know itself.

But the little man paid no reverence to things that were sacred, and showed no respect to persons lost in holy meditation. Hastily, and we might almost venture to say vulgarly, he tapped two fingers of his right hand against his nose; and then, in a most unseemly manner, he summoned the eyes that were inwardly inclined, by giving their owner a nudge in that part where the waist should have been.

"Come," he said, "I want twenty thousand pounds."

"So do I," replied the sanctimonious man of business. "This morning I received a circular, which informs me that the Church is in danger from the combined attacks of Radicals and Atheists; and it will be my duty as a man, and, I may say, as an alderman, to give my money, if not my blood, in defence of that noble institution, by law established."

"You'll soon be in another glorious institution, by law established for the picking of oakum, if you don't look out, you blessed hypocrite, you!"

"There's not a person of importance in the City of London who doesn't know me as a man

of sterling merit; and no subscription-list is complete without the name of Alderman Thompson."

"You always do your alms before men to be seen of them," Samuel Soper said, scornfully.

"It's a lie, sir, a damnable lie!" the alderman exclaimed in righteous indignation. "The devil, it has been said by one of our eminent divines, can quote from Holy Writ; and I may add, to refute your calumny, 'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works.'"

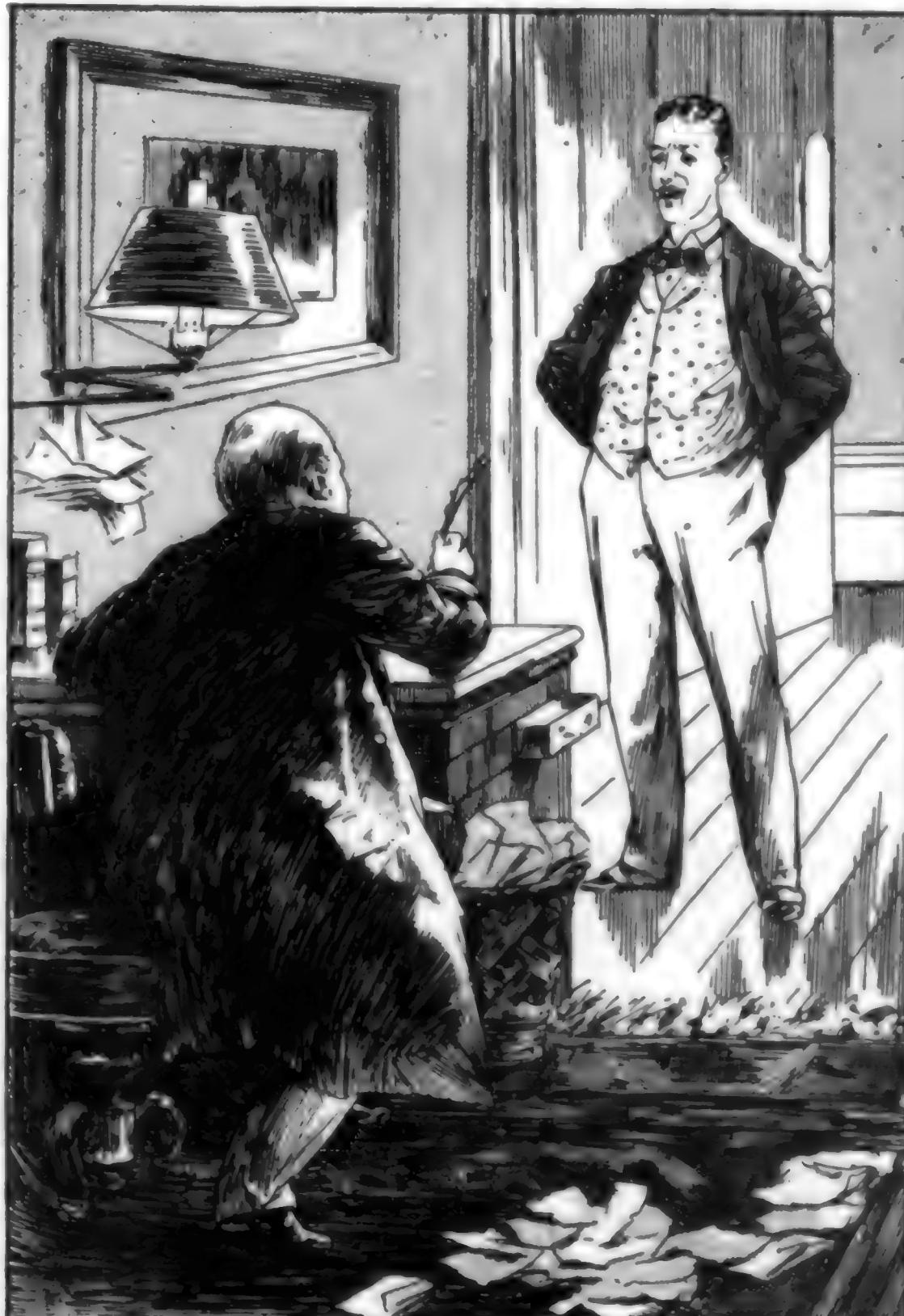
"Well, what does the Church and all these blessed charities matter to you, who never get anything out of them?" Samuel Soper asked.

"The praise of godly men is sweet to the righteous, and when his enemies rise up against him, and the wicked strive to bring him to destruction, he may even find safety and refuge amongst them," the great man replied.

"A poor refuge they'll be, if I turn Queen's evidence. Why, you'd be safer in Spain, amongst the Catholics, for there's no extradition treaty."

"I could not live amongst people who sin on Saturday night and buy absolution on Sunday morning," the alderman replied. "Here, in the City, it has sometimes been my fate to herd with thieves; but I am glad to say that they have almost all been orthodox Christians."

"Mary Smith and I have come to an arrangement," Samuel Soper said abruptly. "We are both going to sail under the same colours, and if you won't engage us, we will see whether your brother won't take us up."



THE ALDERMAN WROTE A CHEQUE FOR ONE THOUSAND POUNDS.

"My dear friend," said the alderman, "I should soon be a sinking vessel were I to do as you propose. If I were to spend my golden force in pumping out your iniquitous testimony, you would be back again immediately; and every time I expended my power in expelling you, I should become weaker, whilst you would grow stronger. But I don't want you here in the office; and you may tear up the partnership deed, and leave me alone to float on the waters of commerce. You're like Jonah; and, I can assure you, it would be credited to your account hereafter, if you would consent to go overboard. But I know that you are a sinner, and that you do not think enough of the storm of wrath to come; so if you will allow me to steer my course without the burthen of your ungodly presence, I will give you a thousand pounds a year as an insurance premium."

Samuel Soper did his best to induce the alderman to pay him a large capital sum; but the auctioneer would not be persuaded, and the little man had to content himself with what was offered him.

"You must settle it upon me, so that you can't draw back; and you must make it payable yearly in advance," he said at last.

"Yes, I don't mind that," the alderman replied.

"All right!" Samuel Soper exclaimed. "I'll take the first thousand at once, if you don't mind."

The alderman took out his cheque-book, and wrote a cheque for one thousand pounds. He did this slowly and deliberately, glancing every now and then at Samuel Soper, and at a paper in the little man's handwriting; and when he had passed the cheque to his former partner, he smiled benignly, as if he wanted it to be understood that he at any rate could forgive his enemies, and love his neighbour as himself.

"You had better stay here a little while, and pack up anything that belongs to you; and it would not be amiss if you could let the clerks understand that we have quarrelled, and that you are not coming back here any more," the alderman observed in his mellifluous tone of voice.

"Right you are, old man," Samuel Soper replied. "You will have the deed drawn up, and sent to me as soon as it is ready."

"Certainly," replied the auctioneer. "The consideration must be your agreement not to set up in business to oppose me."

"That's the ticket; and if ever you want anybody to give evidence as to your character, you'll only have to come to my shop," the little man answered. Then he gave a broad grin, complimented his companion on being cunning, and winked his eye to express his admiration.

With a benignant smile on his face the alderman opened the door, and then beginning to speak in a loud tone, he said: "Now you will be good enough to make haste, Mr. Soper. I have been the making of you, and this is the way you show your gratitude; but I won't stand any more of your nonsense, so there now!"

"Right you are, old man," Samuel Soper answered, loud enough now for the clerks to hear, as the auctioneer was leaving his private office.

The alderman went to his solicitor, Mr. John Jones, of Jones and Doem, and requested that gentleman to give notice to the *Gazette* of the dissolution of partnership between himself and Samuel Soper, and to take any other steps that might be necessary. Whilst the auctioneer was giving these instructions to his lawyer, he assumed a look of injured innocence which made Mr. Jones wonder what offence the little man could have committed.

"Would you believe it, Mr. Jones?" the alderman said at last, as if he could no longer restrain his wrath, "I have been the making of that man, and yet he came to me this morning and said that he wanted twenty thousand pounds. I refused to give him a halfpenny, and then he threatened to swear that my father's will, which he witnessed, was a forgery, and that I, and not my brother, was the man who married Mary Smith. He told me that he had come to an arrangement with this woman; but I gave him fair notice that if they trouble me, I will indict the pair of them for conspiracy," the alderman said, perspiring and wrathful.

"You could not have done better, even with our advice," the solicitor replied.

"When I was young, I made him a partner, because I thought that wit was the best thing to go down with the hammer," the alderman continued, rising as his indignation seemed to overpower him.

"If he troubles you again come to me, and we shall know how to deal with the gentleman," the solicitor said.

"I told him to pack up and be off; but if he comes back, or threatens me again, I'll send for you."

When the alderman returned to Bucklersbury, he found that Samuel Soper had left the office; and he noticed his cheque-book on the table. He looked at it, and then called one of the clerks, and told him that he missed one of his blank cheques. It was gone, he said, and no entry had been made on the counterfoil.

The young man assured the alderman that no one, except Mr. Soper, had been in the room since luncheon-time; and the alderman then went to the Metropolitan and County Bank, where he kept his account. The alderman was a director of the bank, and he immediately told one of the cashiers that a blank cheque had been extracted from his cheque-book without his knowledge or consent.

"Mr. Soper brought a cheque for a thousand pounds a little while ago, but I suppose that is all right," the clerk replied.

"I should like to see that cheque," the alderman said drily.

The bank official looked at it carefully himself, and then handed it to the director.

"I hope it is all right," the young man said. "I noticed that the signature was not much like your usual one, but I knew Mr. Soper, and I cashed it."

The alderman looked at the cheque, and then said he would take it to the manager.

"This is a forgery, and a clumsy one too, Mr. Robinson," the alderman said, when he had entered the manager's room.

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear it," the manager replied; and then, having glanced at the signature, he continued, "It would not have deceived me. But do you know who presented it?"

"Mr. Soper," the alderman replied.

"Your partner?" said the manager.

"He was my partner until this morning," the alderman answered; and then he explained why he had dissolved partnership with the little man, in words very similar to those which he had employed in giving his account of the matter to the solicitor.

The manager touched the bell, and sent for the cashier who had paid the money; and when this young gentleman was asked why he had been misled by so poor a forgery, he answered that, as he knew Mr. Soper by sight he thought, it was all right, though he did notice that the signature was not written with the alderman's usual distinctness and boldness.

"You see that h," the alderman said; "I knew at once that the letter was not mine; and then compare this loop with the one I make. Mine is always well rounded; but here the forger, unaccustomed to making such loops, has stopped every now and then to see how his pen should go; and whilst I never lift my pen in making it, he seems to have done so more than once."

"It is a very clumsy forgery, and the cheque ought never to have been cashed," the manager said, looking severely at the cashier who had paid the money.

"No," said the alderman, interpreting that look. "Considering that this gentleman knew that Mr. Soper was my partner, he is not much to blame; and this will teach him to be more careful in the future. I was wrong to leave my cheque-book about, and of course I shall bear the loss; that is," the alderman added, "if we cannot capture Mr. Samuel Soper with the money."

"Take the number of the notes, and stop them at the Bank of England at once," the manager said to the cashier.

"And after you have done that you might call and tell Mr. Jones, my solicitor, of 7, Philpot-lane, that I want to see him here at once with reference to Mr. Soper," the alderman said.

The cashier learned at the bank that one of the notes for a hundred pounds had been exchanged for gold; and when the alderman and his solicitor went to Samuel Soper's lodgings,

they were informed that he had gone away for some time, and had left no address. A warrant was then issued for his arrest; and the alderman congratulated himself upon having his most dangerous adversary in his power at last.

Meanwhile the little man had been congratulating himself upon being so sharp and sly as even to get the better of the alderman. But Samuel Soper was not quite at his ease. He felt certain that his wife would go to Lily, confess the fraud which she had committed, and speak of the forgery; but the little man was not quite so sure that she would be able to obtain an immunity from arrest for her husband. It occurred to him that a month's trip to Spain would afford him a pleasant excursion, and a safe refuge from the police, if necessary; so he made his arrangements, and took one of Cook's second-class tickets for a tour in Spain.

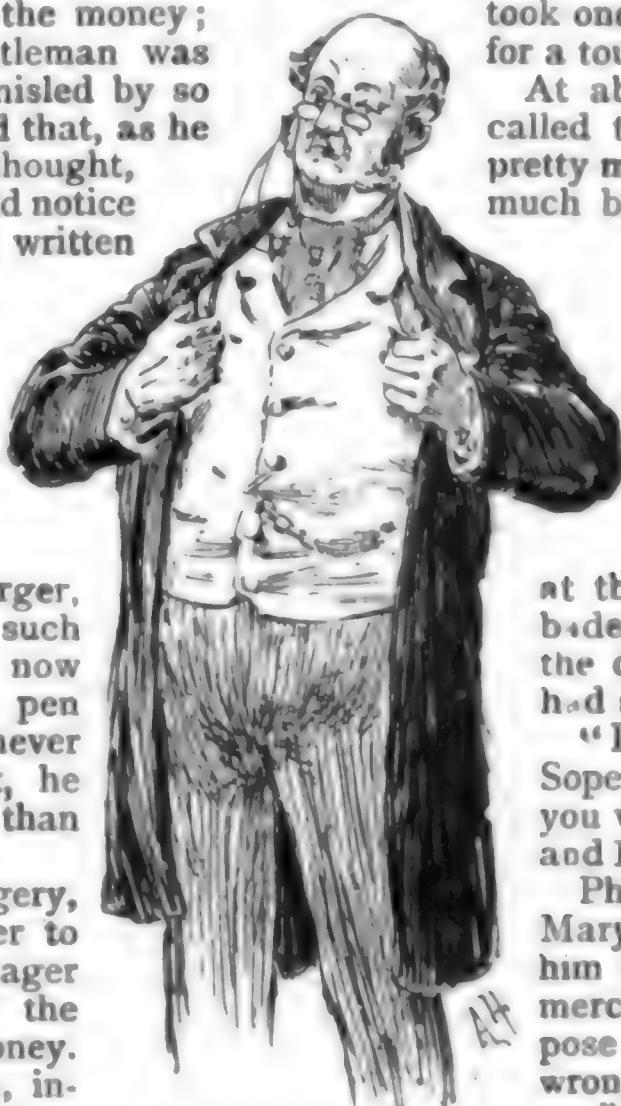
At about the same time, Mrs. Soper called to see Lily; and she found the pretty maiden with her cousin, who was much better. Dick had told Lily that

he had lost all hope of proving her father's innocence; and though he had not repeated all the hospital nurse had said to him, the little maiden had heard enough to make her very sad at heart.

When Mrs. Soper was shown into the room, Dick looked up at the woman angrily; and he forbade her to tell his cousin any of the details of the wrongs which she had suffered.

"I did not come to do that," Mrs. Soper humbly replied. "I deceived you when you saw me at the hospital, and I have come to confess the truth.

Philip Thompson never married Mary Smith; and when I claimed him as my husband, I did so with mercenary motives, and for the purpose of obtaining revenge for a wrong which I thought he had done me."



"YOU COULD NOT HAVE DONE BETTER, EVEN WITH OUR ADVICE."

"My father was not guilty of bigamy," Lily said joyfully.

"No, he was not guilty, and I will prove this; but before I tell you any more I must make you both promise that you will neither prosecute my husband, nor allow anything I say now to be used against him by others," the nurse said.

"Your earnestness imposed upon me before, and how are we to know that you are not misleading us now?" Dick asked.

"I can have nothing to gain by owning that I have done wrong; and I do not ask for immunity for myself, but only for my husband," the woman pleaded.

"I will promise you what you ask," Lily said, "and if you prove my father's innocence I shall be very grateful to you."

"Mary Smith and I were apprentices in a millinery and underclothing shop at Croydon,

when Alderman Thompson was a cadet at Addiscombe," the nurse began. "I knew him, and he told me his name was Philip Robinson, but I learned afterwards that his surname was Thompson.

"Before this, however, I had been sent away from the shop in disgrace. Mrs. Adams, who kept it, used to take a number of apprentices, getting a small premium with each; and when work was slack, she was only too glad of an excuse to get rid of any of us. Whilst there was plenty of plain sewing to be done, she made us work hard; but when she had no contract to complete, instead of teaching us millinery, as she'd agreed to do, she let us run about the streets as we liked, as long as we got back by eleven. The cadet Thompson—for I may as well give him his real name—spoke to me one day, and soon afterwards vowed that he loved me more than he loved his life; and yet one night he deliberately misled me as to the hour, and I was locked out. I spent the night walking about out of doors, and the next morning I was dismissed in disgrace.

"I wrote to my aunt, who had apprenticed me to Mrs. Adams; but she had paid the premium to get rid of me, having two daughters of her own, and only a small business in the green-grocery line; and my cousins, who were as ugly as sin, preferred to do all the work rather than have me with them, because they thought that they would never get married as long as I remained in the house. I only got a letter from one of them, and was told that as I'd made my bed, so I should have to lie on it.

"I took a cheap room in a low part of Croydon, and wrote a letter to the cadet; but I had not written to him by his right name, and my note came back. I pawned things to pay my way, and waited about the streets, hoping to see him; and I did see him at last, but not alone. He was with Mary Smith, and he turned away to avoid me; and when I caught him alone the same evening, on his way back to college, he let me understand that he also would have nothing more to do with me. Oh! what fools we women are, not to know that all men are villains!"

Lily pressed Dick's hand to express a different opinion, and he looked angrily at the nurse, but said nothing, lest his words should stop her confession.

"Without a friend or a character I could not gain an honest living; and as I had not the courage to die, I took to begging—and worse. I went up to town, of course; but that was after I had robbed the woman with whom I lodged, and whom I could not pay. I sent her the value of what I took, and more, when I'd been some time at the hospital; still, I know that doesn't undo the wrong.

"You are anxious for me to come to the point, and I won't keep away from it any longer. Well, in town, I ran against Mary Smith, and she told me she was Mrs. Thompson. I didn't believe that she was really married at first, and I warned her against the man who was the cause of my undoing; but she showed me her marriage lines, and, like

the good Christian that she was, she helped me with the villain's money.

"I knew from the first that she was not happy, but she never complained to me until he had deserted her, as he had deserted me. He was going to India, and she knew it; and a little while before his ship sailed he quarrelled with her, and told her that she should never see him again. Their marriage, he said, was not legal, because they had not lived in the parish where the banns were published; he had had the banns put up at Haggerstone whilst they were both at Croydon, but he lied when he said that this made any difference to the legality of the marriage.

"Well, as I said, there was a quarrel, and his wife tried to prevent him leaving her in anger; she clung to him, and would not let him go; and finally he knocked her down, giving the poor thing a black eye as a parting gift.

"She came to me in her trouble, weeping as though her heart would break, because she could not give me any more help, and because she feared she would never set eyes on the villain again. Still, she knew where his folks lived, and that he was going down there for a few days before he sailed; and as she couldn't bear the idea of giving him up, and hadn't any money to speak of, I advised her to go down after him.

"Instead of seeing her husband, she was shown in to his father; and the old man told her that he had disowned and disinherited his son Philip, and certainly did not intend to acknowledge Philip's wife. He noticed the black eye, however, and guessed that her husband had given it to her; and then he said that he had subscribed a large sum towards the completion of the fever hospital, and offered her an introduction to the matron, who would probably take her as a nurse on probation, if she presented his recommendation.

"Mary took the letter, and came away from the house; but before she had got to the station, her husband overtook her. She said she was sorry he had been disinherited; and he cursed her, and said it was all her fault, and that he would be a pauper all his life, because his father would never forgive him as long as she lived.

"Well, she loved the fellow more than she did her life, which he had ruined; and when they parted she had promised to die that night, and he had pledged himself to pass the night in praying for her—just as if his prayers were likely to do any one any good. A kiss and a promise to pray was the price he paid for his freedom.

"The poor wife came to me, and gave me her marriage lines, some verses which her husband had given her, and other things which she did not want any more, besides the letter of introduction, which she told me I might use if I liked. She could do nothing with it herself, she said—even if she did not keep her promise to her husband—as she was likely to become a mo'her; and she gave it to me, so that she might rescue one of her husband's victims from a life of crime.

"I did try to persuade her not to throw away her life to please a villain; but as I feared to lose my chance of escaping from a life of infamy if I called in the assistance of the police, I let her go unto her doom, wretch that I was!"

"Was Mary Smith the woman who committed suicide in the Waddon millpool?" Dick asked, after a long pause.

"Yes," the nurse replied.

"You have said nothing yet about your husband," he continued.

"I was married to Samuel Soper yesterday," the nurse answered sadly. "But he thought I was the alderman's wife, and that the marriage would consequently be illegal; and when he found that he was bound to me for life, he was angry, and we parted. Before our marriage, however, he had told me about the forgery of the will under which the alderman took all your grandfather's money; and when we were parting, and I told him that I should come to you and confess all, he said he would turn Queen's evidence to save himself, if you would give him the chance."

"May I ask you what object you have in coming here to tell us all this?" Dick inquired.

"I want the man who is morally guilty of the murder of Mary Smith to be punished," she answered.

"You must give us time to think the matter over," Dick said. "We cannot come to any decision at once."

"Very well," she replied, "you know where to find me if you want me again. But please ask for me as Miss Smith, for no one in the hospital knows that I am married, and now that my husband does not wish me to live with him as his wife, I should like to stay where I am. It is the only place where I can do a little good in the world, and I have been there so long that I should not like to leave in disgrace."

Lily noticed that tears were trickling down the cheeks of the repentant woman; and the little maiden went to the nurse, took her by the hand, and said how thankful she was to the poor woman, who had confessed her faults in order that the innocent might no longer suffer. The guilty woman had been shown but little kindness, and ennobling love had never since her infancy been granted to her; and though she had been tempted and had sinned, she had seized the first opportunity to escape

from a life of shame, and had never sunk to the lowest depth of infamy. She was very grateful to Lily, and though she could not say this in words, the little maiden was able to read the thoughts passing in the mind of this woman, who was not hopelessly lost to virtue.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

PHILIP THOMPSON had lodgings in Mulberry-street, Liverpool, but he spent most of his time in the public reading-room. There he looked at the reviews, and carefully examined the lists of forthcoming books in the *Athenæum*, the *Academy*, and the *Literary World*; but his own novel was not mentioned, and week after week he waited, hoping that it would be announced in the next issue. He wrote a little, too; but night after night he could not sleep, and pain, weakness, and nervous depression, made the days seem long.

He bore his suffering bravely, because he thought that Lily would benefit by his absence. But day by day he felt that he was losing strength; and his cough became more troublesome, his appetite failed him, and he could only write for a few minutes at a time. Then the pain became more acute, and he was con-



PHILIP THOMPSON IN THE COFFEE-ROOM AT THE WHITE HART.

fined to his bed; and when he became better the doctor warned him that he had not long to live, and advised him to go to his friends. He was very weak, and he knew that his end was near; and the longing to say a parting word to the dear child entrusted to his care, became too powerful for him to overcome. But he made up his mind to see her at the alderman's house, and to do so, if possible, without allowing the adventuress, who called herself his wife, to know that he had returned.

The long journey to London was safely accomplished; and he rose early the following morning, and went down to Romford. He knew that the alderman usually came up to town by the ten o'clock train; and he met this, and saw his brother drive up to the station.

The alderman had received a telegram, stating that Samuel Soper had been arrested at Dover; and with this attempt to escape Dick's apology, and his brother's absence in

his favour, the auctioneer anticipated an easy victory. But whilst he was rejoicing in the anticipation of the punishment of the man who had been his partner, he recognised his brother, standing by his side; and his face became suddenly pale, and he trembled with fear.

"You here!" he exclaimed in anger and alarm.

"Yes," Philip answered. "I wanted to see Lily again, and I could not wait any longer."

"Hush!" the alderman said. "We must not be seen together."

"Could I come to your house to-night?" Philip asked.

The alderman hesitated, and then replied, "Come exactly at midnight, and let yourself in to my library by the conservatory. I will see that all the doors are left open; but you must keep yourself out of the way during the day, and be seen by nobody."

"I am much obliged to you," Philip answered.

"Everybody will be in bed at that hour, and no one will see you. I will explain everything to you then; but you must give me your word of honour that you'll come, for I can't take all this trouble for nothing," the alderman said, looking sharply at his brother.

"I pledge you my word of honour," Philip replied, and then the alderman left him abruptly.

Philip was tired, and he went to the White Hart hotel to rest. He had taken no breakfast, but he was suffering acute pain, and had no appetite; and he only ordered a cup of tea.

There were two commercial travellers in the coffee-room, and he took up a newspaper to hide his face, which bore traces of the agony he was enduring. At first, he did not listen to what the two men were talking about; but he soon heard his brother's name mentioned, and then he paid some attention to their conversation.

"I should not like to stand in Samuel Soper's shoes for something, I can tell you," one of them remarked. "The alderman is not a man to be trifled with, I'll answer for it; and yet there may be some truth in the little man's accusation—I won't deny that."

"He's accused of forging a cheque for a thousand pounds," said the other, "and also with trying to obtain money by threatening to prove that the alderman forged his father's will and committed bigamy. It doesn't sound probable—now does it?"

"You must remember the alderman's only son charged his father with committing the same offences, and though the alderman prosecuted for assault, he did not dare to go into the witness-box to stand cross-examination. That looks fishy, doesn't it?"

"The son's a ne'er-do-well, I suppose?" the other rejoined.

"Not at all; he took a first-class in classics at Oxford not long ago, and all the people about here, who know him, speak in his favour," the elder commercial replied.

"How was it father and son fell out?" the younger man asked.

"Oh! the son was in love with his cousin; but as she wasn't worth sixpence the alderman wouldn't hear of the match; and first of all he turned his son out of doors, and then did ditto to his niece. But I daresay you've seen the girl, for she's playing at the Adelphi under the name of Lily Flower."

"I've heard of her," said the other, "but I haven't seen her yet. Plucky sort of girl, I suppose? Well, I don't mind them lively-like."

"This affair will turn out sensational, I expect; for we're likely to have the son in the box against his father, and Mr. Alderman Thompson won't be able to escape cross-examination this time."

"I don't know that," replied the other. "It's a felony to try to get money by threats, even if the charge is true."

"Yes, but still counsel can cross-examine him as to character, if he goes into the box to swear that the signature to the cheque is not genuine. He can't get over that."

"I suppose they haven't an old paper with a report of the assault case in the house?" the other man inquired.

"Yes, they have, for William showed it to me last night," was the answer.

One of the men touched the bell, and the waiter soon found the number of the local newspaper which gave a full report of Dick's trial for assaulting his mother and the footman.

Philip Thompson was alarmed for Lily's safety; the paper, he held, fell from his hand; and for a moment the commercial travellers were astonished by the sight of his thin pale face. He felt choking, the room seemed to be going round, and his head throbbed; but soon the pain ceased, and he became unconscious.

When he recovered, besides himself there was only a doctor in the room; and this gentleman was leaning over him and asking him how he felt.

"I am better now," he replied, "but I am almost worn out."

"You should go home," the doctor said, "for you are very weak and ill."

"I am going," Philip replied, "but I will take a cup of tea first, as it may give me a little strength for my journey."

"Your tea is cold; for you have been unconscious a long time," the doctor answered. "I will order some brandy and water for you, but you must not travel alone."

"Oh! I am much stronger now," Philip Thompson said. "I have something to do in town, and shall get on all right, thank you. But I will take a little brandy and water, as I have a tiring day's work before me."

"You are not fit for work of any sort," the doctor replied, "and if you over-exert yourself it may cost you your life."

"In any case," Philip said, "that is not worth many days' purchase, is it?"

"Then it is not my sad duty to tell you this for the first time," the doctor answered.

There was a momentary pause, and then the doctor continued: "If you do not excite yourself you may still live longer than we have a right to expect; but you must not travel alone."

"I must," Philip replied. "I am stronger than you think. Indeed I am!"

Dr. Robinson shook his head, but he had no authority to detain a stranger; and he accepted his fee, and went away on his rounds to his patients. Then Philip was driven to the station, and he went up to town; and having arrived at Liverpool Street station, he took a cab to Mrs. Edwards' house in Keppel Street, where he hoped to find his daughter.

On the way he wondered what he should do if Lily were not there; and then the pain came on, and each breath he drew and each beat of his heart he feared would be his last. It was only another fainting fit, and he soon recovered; but when he arrived at Keppel Street, he could not walk without assistance. He was very glad to hear that Lily was in; and whilst Mrs. Edwards was helping him up the stairs, the little maiden rushed down to meet him. Lily had been told by the servant of her father's arrival, and she was happier than she could have told in words; but then suddenly she saw him, and all signs of joy faded away from her cheeks.

The poet's wan face foreboded coming death; and his daughter could scarcely restrain her tears, as she welcomed him back. For a little while he could not talk to her or

to Dick, who had now almost recovered from the illness which want of food had caused; but when he had taken a glass of wine, and had regained a little strength, Lily told him that his innocence was proved.

It took her some time to mention all that had happened during his absence, but while she spoke she was sitting close to him, and his arm rested on her shoulder. She forgot the fear which his appearance had caused, and for a little while he suffered no pain, and was very happy.

This intermission, however, did not last long, and the agony returned, and with it the recollection of the fact that he had not long to live. He saw, too, that Lily was aware of his suffering, and wishing to comfort her, he said—

"Little one, the joys of this life are alloyed with pain, but in the world for which we are here preparing, there will be only happiness and bliss. I shall meet your mother soon, and you in time will come to us, and we shall abide together in loving unity. Even hope, that can so easily deceive mankind, cannot array the future in fancied beauty

greater than that which is to be." He spoke in a pleasant tone, but as he kissed Lily, his eyes were full of tears, for he found the parting bitter, now that it had almost come.

"You are not dying, papa?" Lily said, sorrowfully.

"Yes, little one," he answered. "I am parting with the world, as we must all do, sooner or later. I have but a little while to tarry on



"IN THE WORLD FOR WHICH WE ARE HERE PREPARING, THERE IS ONLY HAPPINESS AND BLISS."

earth, but I would like to see you married and happy before I go hence."

The little maiden blushed, and glanced furtively at Dick, but she did not reply.

"I love Lily dearly," Dick said. "But I could not live upon what she earns on the stage. I objected to her adopting that profession, and I am sorry she could find no other occupation to suit her. But now I am poor, and she is rich; and we must wait awhile, as I must make myself independent before I can marry her."

"We should all endeavour to be of some use in this world," Philip Thompson answered, "and the actress upon the stage can teach a moral lesson; for if the playwright has done good work the part prepared for her must be worthy of a noble woman. But you need not live upon Lily's earnings; you also will do something, and what both gain more than you need you can give away to the poor. There are always some who are unable to labour, and their necessities you can supply. We should all help one another, and it was only false pride which prevented you accepting from Lily's hand the necessaries which you required. It was not right of you to stay away from her, when you were in want; for life was entrusted to each of us for a good purpose, and no one has a right to lay his down at will."

Dick loved his cousin dearly, and was glad to be convinced; and when Philip Thompson urged that he would not be alive to see his daughter married, unless this ceremony were celebrated without delay, Dick consented to go at once to Doctors' Commons to obtain a license. But then he remembered that he had no money, and he did not like to ask his uncle or Lily for any. He hesitated, and looked foolish; but Lily soon guessed the cause of his embarrassment. She begged him to stay a minute, and when she returned to the room she shyly gave him her purse.

Lily and her father were left alone, and the little maiden told Philip Thompson again how glad she was to welcome him back. Her voice was low, plaintive, and inexpressibly sweet; but though she was trying to rejoice at her father's return, she could scarcely restrain herself from weeping whenever she looked at his face and saw how ill he was.

"Do not be sad, little one," he said. "I want to see you happy and contented, and to know that your future will be brightened by love."

She kissed him fondly, and then she asked him to allow her to send for a doctor; but he shook his head, and answered that it was beyond the power of any physician to help him.

"Lily, my pet," he continued, "I have almost reached my goal, and you would not wish to keep me here in pain and agony, if it were in your power. I shall be with your mother again, and in time you and Dick will come to us, and we shall all be happy together. You must not weep, little one, for you do not wish to dishearten me."

"I cannot bear to part with you, papa

dear," she answered, and then he kissed away her tears, as gently as if he had been her lover.

He spoke of her future happiness, and she blushed and looked pleased when he mentioned Dick; and she was glad when he began to read his nephew's comedy, and delighted when he stopped to criticise and to praise.

Dick returned with the license, and having forgotten the arguments which he urged against the marriage, he now thought only of the happiness he would enjoy with the fair maiden whom he loved. He kissed Lily, and she returned his caresses; and Philip Thompson, watching them, remembered the happy days of his youth, when Lily Montgomery was about to become his bride. But the pain soon recalled his thoughts to the present, and reminded him that he had only to do what he could for the happiness of others, and to die.

He had not forgotten his promise to the alderman, and when he had wished the young couple all the joy and gladness which their imaginations could picture to themselves, he told them that it would be necessary for him to go down to Romford to see his brother, and to listen to the explanation which the alderman had promised to make. Dick advised his uncle not to go, and Lily told her father that he was not strong enough for the journey, but Philip Thompson would not be persuaded.

"It is a duty," Philip said, "which I owe to my brother to listen to any plea that he can urge in his defence. If he has done wrong, I do not wish to punish him; but if Samuel Soper is telling the truth, William must withdraw from the prosecution. As to the money, even if it belongs to me I will not take it all from him; and he shall keep the business and Havering Hall."

"I do not wish you to be rich, Lily," he continued after a pause. "I wish you both to do some good work in the world; and if great wealth were yours, you would find this more difficult. You are now setting a good example upon the stage, and there in a quiet unobtrusive manner you will be able to assist those who are weaker than yourself. Dick can write well: and he has shown in this comedy that he can teach a good lesson, whilst affording amusement to those who require recreation after the labours of the day. If I am entitled to my father's money, he will use the greater part of it for the benefit of the poor. You will promise to do that, will you not, Dick?"

"Yes, uncle," Dick answered, taking Philip Thompson's thin hand. "I promise you; but I hope you will live to do this for yourself."

The poor invalid pressed Dick's hand, but he did not reply; the young lovers were happy, and he did not wish to speak again of death.

The time passed quickly, and Philip and Dick accompanied Lily to the theatre; and when they had left her there, they went on to Liverpool Street station, and thence to Romford. They stayed at the White Hart hotel until it was nearly twelve; and then they hired a carriage, and were driven to the gates of

Havering Hall. It was a dark night, and a little rain was falling; but Philip Thompson got out, and walked towards the house. Dick had wished to accompany his uncle; and as he was not allowed to do this, he waited a little, and then, keeping on the grass, at the side of the carriage-drive, he followed the invalid, who, he feared, might require his assistance.

Philip Thompson walked on slowly towards the house, resting every now and then to recover his strength. Pain and utter weariness of body oppressed him; and it was as much as he could do to pursue his way after a long interval of rest. He could not see distinctly, but he noticed that much had been changed since his last visit to his father's home. Here and there the underwood had grown up, thick and tangled; new shrubs had been planted, and flower-beds had been made; but there were still the old oaks and the old elms, and these large trees rose, gaunt and spectral, on the right and on the left.



PHILIP THOMPSON WALKED ON SLOWLY TOWARDS THE HOUSE.

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CHAPTER XXI.
IN SUSPENSE.
THE alderman, after parting with his brother on the platform at Romford, began to consider whether it would still be advisable to continue the prosecution of Samuel Soper. This was a difficult question, and he did not come to any decision when he reached the City; but he went directly from Liverpool Street station to his solicitor's office, and told Mr. Jones that he had known Samuel Soper many years, and that he was loth to punish his late partner for the crimes which the fellow

had committed with such base ingratitude. The solicitor said he respected his client all the more for this emotion, which did such honour to the alderman's noble heart; but at the same time he stated that it was too late to abandon the prosecution, and that the criminal would only suffer the just penalty of his offences.

Mr. Thompson sighed, and acquiesced. He accompanied his solicitor to the Mansion House; and when Samuel Soper had been placed in the dock, charged with felony, the alderman went into the witness box and gave evidence against the accused. He swore that the cheque was a forgery, and that he had never authorised the prisoner to sign his name. With reference to the charge of attempting to obtain money by threats, he repeated to the alderman on the bench the tale which he had already told his solicitor; and even the lawyer whom Samuel Soper

had employed, believed the prosecutor's statement.

The banker's clerk swore that the handwriting, though somewhat resembling that of the alderman, differed from it in certain particulars; and he stated that he would have refused to cash the cheque, had it not been presented by the partner of the drawer.

A police constable gave evidence as to the arrest. Two hundred pounds in notes and gold, and a ticket for Madrid, were found in the possession of the prisoner; and when the accused had been cautioned that anything he might say would be used against him, he made a statement, and said:—

"The prosecutor wrote the cheque in my presence, and gave it to me. I could not

write well enough to form some of the letters on the cheque. I never had much education, being born before the School Board times.

"I first made the acquaintance of the prosecutor at Trinity Church, Haggerstone, when he was married to Mary Smith, a milliner, of Croydon. He didn't give his right name on that auspicious occasion, but called himself Philip Thompson; and as he was not accompanied either by an Amazonian army of bridesmaids or by a multitude of admiring friends and relations, my uncle, the parish clerk, gave away the bride, and I and my uncle were the witnesses to the marriage register.

"Three years later, whilst walking along Cheapside, down on my luck, through my uncle having died, leaving me unprovided for, who should run against me but the bridegroom as I had 'elped to a blooming bride! Instead of smiling at me sweetly, as in duty bound, he actually scowled at me; and so I began to chaff him.

"'It's a pleasure to see a gent with a smile like yours in these hard times,' I says, says I. 'Matrimony must agree with you; and there's this to be said for it, that is the easiest sort of meney to be honestly come by. I could get a little of it myself, but it don't pass current, and you can't sell a share in Hymen on 'Change. Women is down, for they've reaped such a precious 'arvest of babies, that the population is a reg'lar drug on the market. 'Ere am I, a orphan as nobody owns, and they'll rattle my bones over the stones, and give me a three years' lease of a pauper grave, all free, gratis, for nothing, afore I'm much older, if you don't shell out to one as 'elped you to a wife, and is a-starving 'issel in utter loneliness.'

"'I never met you before, and you are probably mistaking me for somebody else,' the prosecutor answered pompously.

"'That's all my eye,' says I. 'I ain't a born fool, I ain't. A stouter man, like you, may be a person of greater substance, but I'll wager a crown'—as I hadn't got—'that a starving man like me is the sharper. I know a man when I looks at 'im. Let me see, I say; but it ain't what the blind man said, for feeling was more in that chap's line.'

"'You may be mistaking me for a married brother of mine, as we are generally supposed to be much alike,' says he.

"'Oh!' says I, 'I twig. You're them twins that were mixed up in hinfancy, and one buried for t'other!'

"The prosecutor then condescended to contract the muscles of his nearer orbit; that is to say, in less refined lingo, he winked a wunk, and said:—

"'You were present at the marriage of my brother, Philip Thompson, and if anyone asks you about the matter, you had better say so.'

"'I won't be content with saying it,' then says I. 'I'll sing it to the tune of half-a-crown, or to any higher note that you likes to tip me.'

"Well, to cut a long story short, he struck the note suggested, and hurried off; but I

followed him to his lair, having a keen nose to scent a mystery. We often met after this, and upon each occasion Mr. Thompson gave me money, until, about a month after our chance meeting in Cheapside, he took me on as a porter in his father's business; and he supplemented my humble wages with a suitable salary for saying nothing about the clandestine marriage.

"Then, after I had been at the office a little while, the alderman's father died; and he made a will, or rather his son did for him. At any rate, I was at the office that night; and I neither saw Mary Smith, nor her ghost, though the real woman was drowned before that. In any case, the prosecutor brought me the will that night, signed by the testator; he asked me to put my signature as a witness, and I did so, not thinking that there was any harm. Afterwards, he told me not to mention anything about the will; and, as a reward for keeping silence, he took me into partnership. I was under age at the time, but I have received my thousand a year regularly ever since, though I have scarcely done any work.

"On the eleventh of last month I told the prosecutor that I wanted to retire from business, and he agreed to give me a thousand a year. It was expressly stated in the articles of partnership that I was to have nothing if he turned me out, but this was only put in so that I should obtain nothing if at any time I said I did not sign my name in the presence of the testator and of Mary Smith.

"The alderman agreed to pay me the first thousand at once, and he sat down to write a cheque. He told me to pretend to quarrel with him when he had written the cheque; and he spoke angrily to me, when he had opened the door so that the clerks might hear what he said. He's an artful old hypocrite, and he wanted to get rid of me for nothing; and in order to do so, he has accused me of forgery. He boasts of his charity to those who don't know him, but he never gave a sixpence to no one, and he only subscribes to the well-advertised charities."

This statement did not improve Samuel Soper's position, though it seemed to amuse all who were in court, with the exception of the prosecutor; and the prisoner was committed for trial, bail being refused.

The alderman went back to his office, but he could not work. He feared that Philip—angry on account of the charge of theft, of the treatment of Lily, and of the destruction of the manuscript—would prosecute him for forgery; and he thought that the death of his brother would make his position safe. He was aware that he could not be convicted of forgery on the uncorroborated evidence of Samuel Soper, and he did not believe that anyone would credit the little man's statement; but Philip Thompson's evidence would in some points corroborate that of Samuel Soper, and the foolish charge of theft which he had made against his brother would, alone, deprive him of the respect of his fellow-citizens, if Philip were to prove that the accusation was false.

He had no doubt that he would be able to come to terms with Lily and Dick, if necessary, by giving his consent to their marriage; but he had wronged Philip so grievously that he had no hope of gaining his brother's forgiveness; and as he recalled to mind the fact, that Philip was the only person who had much to gain by setting aside the will, he determined that his brother, who was coming to the library at midnight, should not leave his house alive.

The alderman's conscience troubled him a little, and he consequently tried to persuade himself that the crime he was about to commit was for the general good of mankind. He argued that with his capital he gave employment to many persons, and that these individuals would suffer if his money were handed over to his brother; and he wrote a cheque for a hundred pounds, payable to the secretary of the Universal Benevolent Society, of which he had lately been elected president.

He returned home by his usual train, and at dinner he told his wife that he was afraid Samuel Soper had defrauded him of other sums, besides the thousand pounds, and that he intended to spend the evening in going through a book in which his late partner's accounts were entered. He took more wine than was his wont, but it did not make him sleepy; and when he went to the library he sent for some cigars, some brandy, and a jug of water.

For some time he smoked and drank, but at eleven o'clock he became uneasy. He thought of Bruin, and he fetched a revolver, loaded it, and shot the poor creature, simply as an excuse for having the weapon at hand. He told his wife that the dog had disturbed him, and Mrs. Thompson, who had taken a great liking to the gentle animal, went weeping to bed.

Directly after Dick's departure, the weak woman had striven to make terms for her son, and she had even threatened to insist upon sharing her annuity with him. But the tyrant who ruled her, had tempted her with drink; and he had succeeded in making her abject, miserable, and contemptible.

The alderman went to see that the house was locked up for the night, and that all the servants had gone to bed; and when he had done this, he returned to the library, and opened the door which led into the conservatory. Steathily he cracked a pane of glass in the conservatory door, and with some difficulty he removed the greater part of the pane. This he placed upon the floor; and then he returned to the library, leaving the door of this room open, in order that his light might be seen from outside. He looked at his watch, and found that it was a quarter to twelve. His collar irritated his neck, and he thought of the hangman's rope by

which some murderers perish. He drained a glass of brandy and water, and then he reconsidered his scheme; but he could find no fault with it, and he thought himself safe from the hands of justice.

Still, the very thought of his own death made him shudder; and when he closed his eyes he could see the hangman putting the rope around his neck, and the gallows upon which he was to die. He took more brandy to give him courage; but his imagination dwelt upon the terrors of death by the hands of the common hangman, and impotently he cursed his brother, who, he thought, had come back to demand his money, his business, and his lands.

"Death!" The alderman muttered the word, and as he did so, it seemed to him to have a weird sound. He walked up and down the room and repeated it to himself. His eyes were bloodshot, and he looked wild and fierce; and his hand shook as he lifted the glass, half full of brandy, to his lips. Then, the clock struck twelve; and he opened the door, leading into the hall, to see that no one was stirring. All was still, and the terror-stricken man was somewhat reassured. He was alone; the hour was nigh at hand; and he thought there would not be much risk. He unlocked and opened his oak desk; he took out some papers and tried to read them; and then he wrote "Dear Sir," and the date upon a sheet of note paper, that he might seem to have been disturbed whilst writing a letter.

He heard the sound of a man's footsteps outside; and he was afraid of what he was going to do.

Then the sound came nearer; his face was pale and his hands shook; but a little of his courage came back to him. He remembered that he could hear a man walking on the ground some distance off; and there was time yet for him to take some more brandy.

He poured out the spirit, and then gulped it down; and when he heard his brother's footsteps just outside, he was ready—to commit murder.

Philip Thompson knocked at the conservatory door. There was a momentary delay. The alderman took something from his desk. He looked at this for a moment; his mind was clear enough, though he did put his left hand to his forehead, which seemed to throb. He had made no mistake; his brother was now outside, and he held a pistol in his right hand.

There was another tap at the glass door which led into the garden. Then he entered the conservatory; he undid the bolt, and he opened the door. "Who's there?" he shouted.

Without waiting for a reply, the alderman fired. There was a shriek, like that of a man



A LOUNGER IN
COURT.

in the agony of death, and then the sufferer fell heavily to the ground.

The alderman shouted out, "Thieves! thieves!" and ran back into the house. He sounded the gong in the hall, and before long some of the servants and his wife came down. He told them that he had shot a burglar, trying to enter the house; and, accompanied by the butler and footman, he went to the conservatory.

There they all stood for a moment, and the

alderman thought he heard a groan. He was not certain whether it was a sound uttered by his brother, or only the wind moaning as it swept through the trees; but he was frightened, for he knew that a wound would make his position worse instead of better, and that only death could relieve him of the consequences of his former crimes. He went back to the library, took some brandy, and gave some to the men, and then they went out into the garden.

The night was dark, and the wind was high, and their candle blew out. They waited just outside the conservatory and listened; and the footman thought he could hear someone walking away in the distance. The alderman searched for the body of his victim; but, though he walked over the ground carefully, again and again, his feet did not stumble against the dread object that he sought. Then the villain began to fear that his brother had escaped; and he sent the butler for a lantern, in order that he might put an end to the uncertainty, which was causing him such grave alarm.

The wind howled round the house, and its

sound was something like the moaning of a man in agony. The alderman shouted out that he would shoot anybody he found, unless the person who was there came and gave himself up without resistance; but there was no answer. Then, whilst they were waiting for a light, the gate was closed; and directly afterwards they heard the sound of carriage wheels.

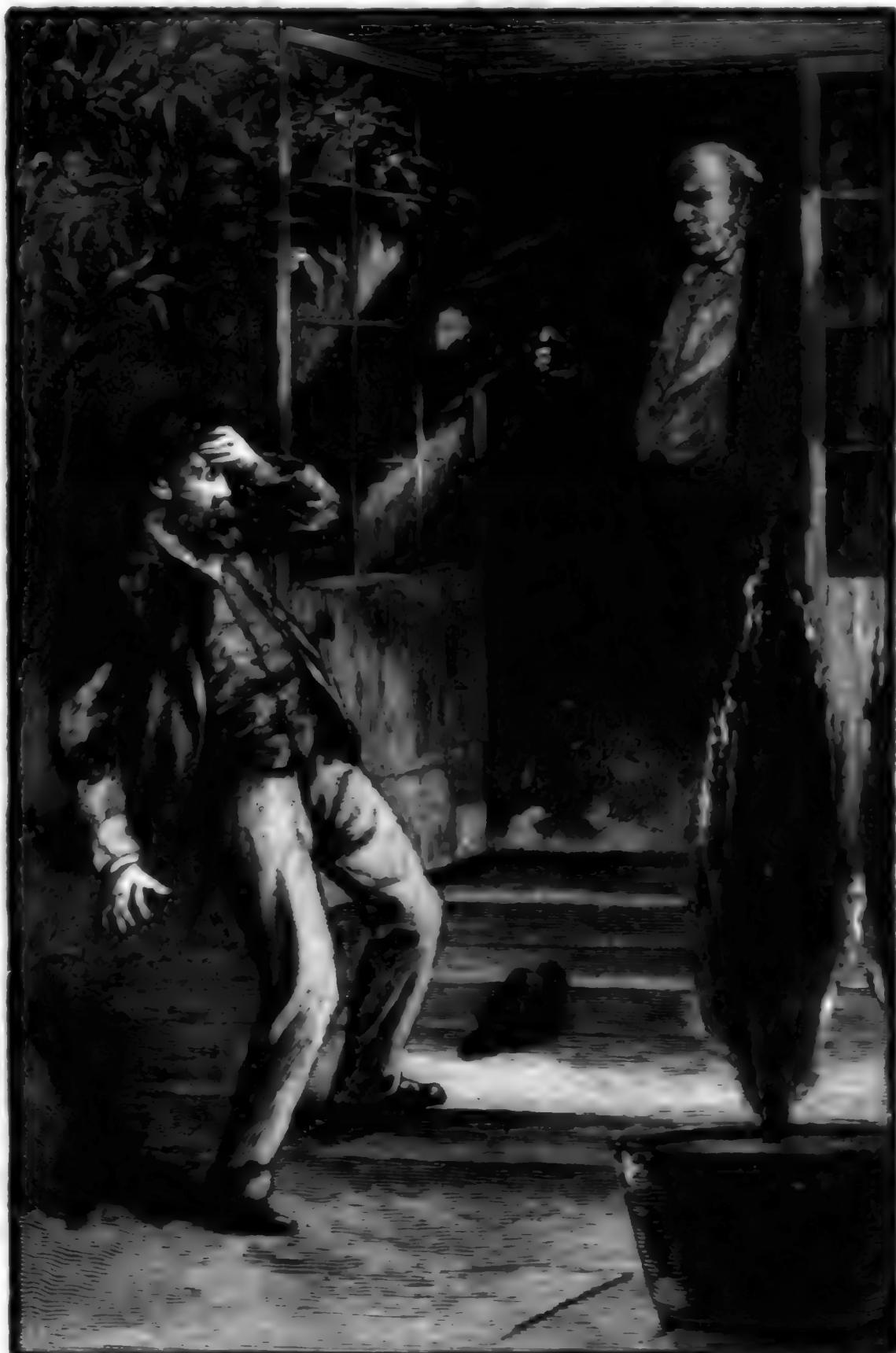
When the butler brought a lantern they searched, but they found no one. The alde-

man cursed and swore, declaring that he would bring the rogues to justice; and the footman said that it was a regular plant, and that the burglars had got away.

The villain was afraid of the consequences of the crimes which he had committed; and he feared that, with his brother as a witness against him, he would be unable to evade disgrace and punishment. He thought of a prison, and he shuddered as he fancied himself condemned to penal servitude for life as a punishment for perjury, forgery, and an attempt to murder. Death even, it seemed to him at that moment,

would be preferable to this lifelong imprisonment; and then it occurred to him that Philip's wound might be mortal. Again his imagination conjured up the hangman and the gallows, and the perspiration stood upon his forehead, though he felt cold as death.

With difficulty, he made his way back into the house; and, though he helped himself liberally to brandy, it did not give him either courage or hope. Still, after a little delay, he managed to tell his wife and the servants that,



THE ALDERMAN UNDID THE BOLT, OPENED THE DOOR, AND FIRED.

whilst he was writing, he heard somebody trying to enter the conservatory, and that he then took the revolver, went into the conservatory, and shot at the fellow, who had opened the door, and was coming towards him.

When the alderman had given this account of what had occurred, he went round the house to see that it was properly secured, and then sent all the servants to bed. His wife took one of his hands in hers, and was about to tell him how glad she was that he had escaped from danger; but he turned away from her, and said he had other matters to think about, and did not want to be bothered. He remembered that, if he had not been so impatient, he could have put his revolver close to his brother's body, and shot him dead upon the spot; and he was vexed with himself, because he had not done this. He wondered in what part of the body Philip had been wounded; whether his brother would prosecute him or not; and how it would all end. His guilty conscience tormented him; and he feared the worst.

He could not run away, for he knew that a man of his build would be easily recognised, and soon captured by the police; and he was aware that his only chance was to remain and insist upon the truth of the tale which he had already told. But there was danger in this, too; and every now and then he started up, feeling an uncomfortable sensation about the throat, and fearing the hangman's grasp. His fat face bore a wild and troubled look; and he writhed, as if afflicted with some internal agony. He could not calmly consider his position, and he could not stay still; and he walked up and down the room, suffering paroxysms of fear, and with his mind full of wrath against himself for having failed in his attempt.

Then he stood still a moment and listened. He opened the door, and cast a fearful glance around; but there was no one outside. It was only the moaning of the wind that he had heard, and he locked the door again. His throat was burning, and he drank some water; but he could not quench his thirst, or put out the raging fever which made his blood seem hot as fire.

He woke his wife, and sent her to fetch some brandy; for he did not now dare to venture downstairs alone. He had already taken more

than usual, and was perhaps not quite sober; but the spirit did him some good, and after a little while he went to bed, though not to sleep.

The alderman was not troubled with remorse; but he was incessantly tortured by thoughts of his failure, and the consequences which this might entail upon him. Again he plotted the murder, and he thought how he could have done it with less danger to himself, and with absolute certainty of success. He remembered how skilful villains had murdered their victims, and only been detected by the omission of some details which at the time had seemed trivial to them; and he was wrath with himself because he had not studied the reports of their crimes in order to learn how he could slay his brother with the least danger of suffering the extreme penalty of the law.

He knew the saying, "Murder will out." But he would have been able to laugh it to scorn, he thought, had he not failed in his attempt. Now he knew that if his brother were to linger and then die, there would be little hope for himself; and if Philip should live, even then he could see no chance of escaping the penalty of the minor crime; and life-long imprisonment seemed to him too terrible to be borne by one like himself, who was accustomed to every luxury and comfort that wealth could buy.

He tossed about on the bed; and his body suffered from fever, and his mind was tortured by horrors conjured up by his imagination. He could not sleep, he could not rest; and more than once he buried his head beneath the bedclothes, hoping in the utter darkness to escape from the dread that haunted him. Lying there, breathing with difficulty, he fancied he could see his brother's corpse; and regularly as his heart beat, there came ringing in his ears over and over again the word murder, murder, murder!

Those who listen to one tune too often, are sometimes troubled with the refrain; and, even long after the music has ceased, this runs on in their ears. But a man troubled with a musical air can hum or play it, and by doing so can rid himself of the burthen; whilst the criminal, who heard his crime proclaimed again and again, was forced by fear to check himself, lest he should utter the word, and acknowledge himself a murderer.





CHAPTER XXII. KINDLY DEATH.

DICK was not far off when the shot was fired, and he immediately ran to his uncle's assistance. He leaned over the fallen man, and he thought at first that Philip Thompson was dead. The open bloodshot eyes seemed to lack the power to see, the small white hands were cold and still, and the poet's face was pale as if the soul had left the clay. Dick, though still weak, tried to carry his uncle to the gates; but, finding this impossible, he hastened to fetch the coachman, and on his return he heard the wounded man's faint moan. Then they carried Philip to the carriage, and Dick told the coachman to drive quickly to the house of a doctor.

The medical man at once recognised the patient, whom he had seen at the hotel during the day; and the wounded man was put to bed, whilst the coachman went for a surgeon. This gentleman, who had been with the Turkish army during the last Russo-Turkish war, soon arrived; and Dick was sent away from the room in order that the medical men might be alone to discuss the condition of their patient. The young man sat down in the library to write a message to Lily on a telegraph form; and it took him some time to arrange his words, so that they should not cause his cousin any unnecessary pain.

When Dick had written this message, the surgeon and the doctor came downstairs; and they told Dick that there was no hope of their patient's recovery. The doctor said that Philip Thompson was in the last stage of consumption, and that he could not have lived much longer, if he had not met with any accident. The two medical men pressed Dick to say how their patient had been shot; and he told them all he knew in as few words as possible.

Philip Thompson remained unconscious all night, and his nephew and a nurse stayed with him. Slowly the minutes passed, and to Dick the night seemed endless. But after hours of weary watching the day dawned at last, and then the wounded man opened his eyes, and wondered where he was. After a while the past came back to him, and the pain became acute; he looked at Dick earnestly, and began to speak; but there was evidently a difficulty about his articulation, and his first words were inaudible.

"Was it my father who shot you?" Dick asked eagerly, when he had sent the nurse away.

Philip kindly put out his hand to his nephew, before he answered: "Dick, my boy, it is better that you should not know."

"My father will be suspected," Dick said, taking his uncle's hand, and looking wistfully at the dying man.

Philip could scarcely breathe; and had he not striven hard to bear the anguish, he would probably have again lost consciousness. Still, he pressed Dick's hand firmly; and, when the spasm was past, he replied:—

"My boy, I can say nothing which it would do you good to hear. I am sorry for you; but I pity your father more. I am going away, and I would carry no malice with me. I would like to say farewell to my brother, to hear him give his consent to your marriage, and to clasp his hand in friendship, before I start hence."

"If my father is a murderer, I cannot marry Lily," Dick said, thinking of what he would have to suffer for his father's crime.

"Dick," the dying man answered, "in a little while now Lily will be an orphan; and she will require some kind friend to protect her, and someone upon whom she can lavish the love of her young heart. You won her love, knowing well what you did; and now, when she will most require your sympathy and protection, you must not desert her. By doing so you would embitter your life—and hers."

"If I were to marry now, my wife would share the disgrace which has fallen upon me; and I love Lily too fondly to make her life wretched," Dick replied firmly.

"First love, which begins in childish companionship, grows up like the little lovers do; and when age has given it strength, the girl may die, but her love is immortal," Philip said.

"I love Lily dearly, but I cannot marry her now," Dick answered.

"When Lily comes," the dying man replied, "she shall decide for herself."

There was another attack of pain; and Dick, watching the pale, thin face, let a tear drop upon the hand of the man who lay there in anguish.

"Your silence gives consent," Philip Thompson continued, when he was again able to speak. "I should like to see Lily and William as soon as they come; but I am tired now, and until then I will try to rest."

Dick wrote to his father, and asked him to come and see the dying man. The note was short, for Dick neither mentioned the crime that had been committed, nor did he insert any message of affection. He did not wish to accuse his father; but, having considered all the circumstances, he had come to the conclusion that he was the son of a murderer.

Meanwhile, one night of agony had made the alderman appear much older; lines of care were plainly marked upon his forehead, his eyes were sunken, and his face was pale and haggard. He had determined to inform the police of the attempt to enter his house; and, having sent one of his servants to the station, he was waiting for the arrival of an officer when his son's note was brought to him. He read it, and it told him the worst: Philip was conscious, though dying.

The alderman would have done anything for his own safety, and he would have taken his brother's hand gladly, if thereby he could have escaped the consequences of his crime; but he supposed that this was some trap which had been set for him, and he determined not to be caught. He no longer entertained much hope of evading the penalty of his crime, and he was stricken with terror at the thought of his own death; but his mind revolted against the idea of the destruction of the only thing he loved, and he possessed a desperate determination not to lay down his life without a struggle.

The slightest circumstance caused him uneasiness, and he feared every one who approached him; and when the police-sergeant was announced, he trembled in every limb, and a cold sweat like that of death was on him. But the officer was most polite to the magistrate; and when the alderman understood that the man had only come in answer to his summons, some of his wonted presence of mind returned. Still, he longed to be innocent, even if innocence were only to be purchased at the price of his wealth; but, alas! the chasm between guilt and innocence can never be recrossed.

The miserable man showed the police sergeant the library and the conservatory; and the officer noticed that when the window shutters, and the iron door which led to the conservatory, were closed, no person outside could tell that there was a light within. On the tiled floor of the conservatory the officer

noticed the greater part of a pane of glass, and he asked how it came there. The alderman trembled, and he hesitated a little before he replied that he supposed the burglar had knocked it down.

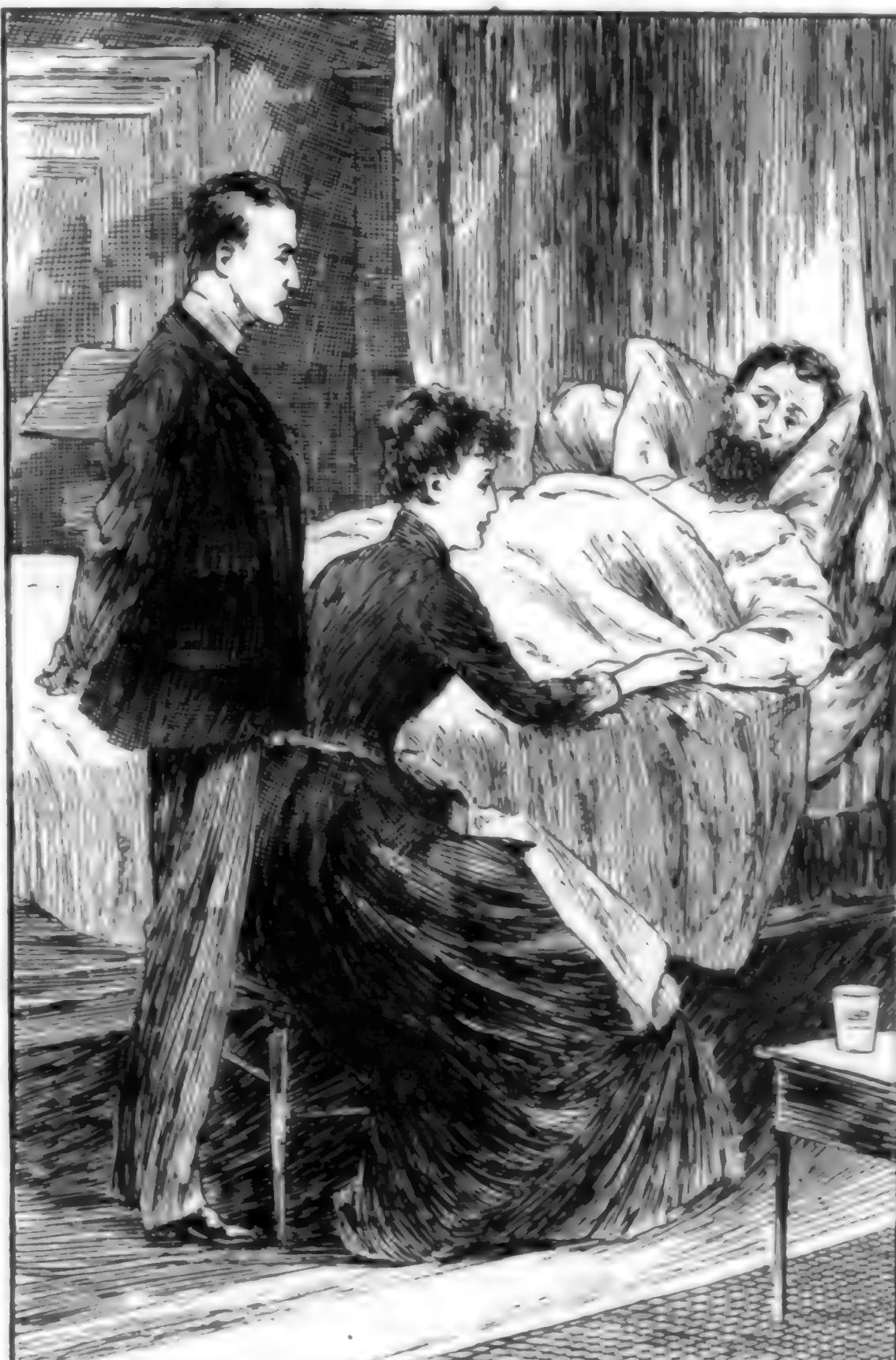
"In that case," the policeman replied, "it would have been broken. But I will ask the men who came here with you last night whether either of them saw it, or placed it there."

The butler stated that he noticed the broken pane in the door and the piece of glass on the ground soon after he entered the conservatory; but the footman said that he knew nothing about it.

"Somebody in the house had something to do with this," the police sergeant said, when the two servants had left the library. "Now, do you usually sit in this room in the evening, sir?"

"Certainly not," the alderman replied angrily, fearing that he was already suspected, "I seldom work of an evening."

"When did anyone in the house first hear of your intention of working here last night?" the police



PASSING HENCE, TO MEET THE DEAR COMPANION OF A HAPPY BYGONE TIME.

sergeant inquired.

"After dinner," the alderman replied curtly.

"Then one of your servants had a hand in this," the sergeant of police stated emphatically.

The alderman was much relieved by this statement, and he told the officer that he had some valuable securities in his desk. He showed these to the man, and said that he intended to place them in the bank for greater safety.

"That's right, sir," the police-sergeant answered. "But I hope we shall catch this fellow; and if you wounded him, we shan't have so much difficulty. Still, as he was in league with one of your servants, I expect he's a knowing one."

The alderman was pleased, and he gave the sergeant a sovereign. "That is for your wife," he said, "as the law does not allow you to accept anything for yourself."

"Quite so, sir," the sergeant replied, "but thank you all the same. Of course, sir, as an alderman, you'll know the law better than me, but between ourselves the man must have shown violence, else it isn't justifiable to shoot them burglars, though they do pick us off without a word of warning."

"The fellow pushed the door open, and I naturally supposed he was about to attack me," the alderman answered. "People don't enter other folks' houses after midnight, you know, with the most honourable intentions."

"Quite so, sir," the sergeant observed. He went as far as the door, and then turned round to add, "My wife's much obliged, sir, or at any rate she would be if I had one. Thank you, sir. Good morning."

The alderman then told his wife that Dick was with Philip at Dr. Robertson's house, and that Philip was very ill. He said he could not go to his brother, as he could not afford the time; but he asked his wife to call, and he intimated that he would not be unwilling to forgive Dick, if in the future his son would try to atone for the past. He said he was always glad to forgive his neighbour, provided that the offender expressed contrition, and had really made up his mind to sin no more.

But long before this time Lily had been alarmed by Dick's message, and it had prepared her for the worst. Her father was sleeping, when she arrived at the doctor's house; and Dick told her what had happened. The little maiden stayed by her father's side; and whilst he lay asleep, she prayed for him. Then remembering how nobly he had spent his life, she offered up prayers for herself, beseeching that strength might also be given unto her, to enable her to do good work in this world. The dying man had taught her to deem death a parting, sad only for those who tarry upon earth; and she looked forward hopefully to the time when she would meet her parents again, having accomplished her earthly pilgrimage.

The doctor told her that she might moisten the sufferer's parched lips; and when she had done this, her father opened his eyes again, and recognised her. He put out his thin hand, and she took it and kissed his forehead.

"Little one," he said, "you love Dick, and he loves you; and so I want you both to promise me that you will marry without any unnecessary delay."

"Lily," he continued, as soon as he was again able to speak, "you are like a delicate plant, and require something to which you can cling for support; and the love of a good man will give you strength to bear the troubles and

trials of life; and you, Dick, will find the loving sympathy of a gentle woman most comforting when the worries of life have tried your patience. Remember me kindly, but do not grieve for me; save your sorrow for those who are left to live on in misery; and help them to the extent of your means."

Dick's and Lily's hands met, but neither spoke; still, the dying man understood their silent consent, and rewarded them with a smile.

Mrs. Thompson now arrived at the doctor's house, and Mrs. Robertson told her how Philip Thompson had been shot. The good woman was shocked by this information, and she went at once upstairs to Philip's room.

"William never meant to hurt you," she said to the dying man. "He thought a burglar was entering the house, and at that time of night he could not expect you. It was unfortunate that Bruin barked so, for if he'd not taken the revolver to shoot the poor creature, it would not have been at hand when you entered."

Philip Thompson sighed.

"Tell William," he said, "that I forgive him for any wrong that he has done me. If wealth had been mine it would have been a temptation, and I might have failed to apply it to the best uses."

"Is there anything we could do for you?" Mrs. Thompson asked in a broken voice. Lily and Dick were so moved by the dying man's words, and by the agony which he was evidently suffering, that neither of them could speak.

"I made my will whilst I was away," Philip replied, "and whatever I have will pass to Lily; but I should like William to have the ring that was our mother's, as a token of my forgiveness. I could not have lived any longer, had I not been shot; I knew I was dying of consumption, and I came back to see Lily for the last time upon earth."

Lily kissed her father, and he noticed that tears were running down her cheeks.

"Do not weep, little one," he said hopefully, "my pain will soon pass away; and I shall be with your mother again. You will wear the pendant with her portrait sometimes, and try to imitate her virtues, so that you may come to us some day."

"Yes, father," she said, "I will try and do all you say, but oh! I want you to guide me."

"God wills otherwise, my child," the dying man answered, "and Dick must be your guardian henceforth. But I am tired now, and I would like you all to take the last sacrament with me, before my spirit passes away."

He rested a little while, and then the service of the Church for the sick was read; and the dying man took the sacrament, accompanied by those who were nearest and dearest to him upon earth. It was a touching scene, and a sacred one; and when the clergyman had administered this last rite, the sufferer, calm, and still in the possession of all his faculties, was prepared to pass unto that bourn from which no man can return.

Dr. Robertson had given notice to the police, and two magistrates came to take Philip Thompson's depositions. But the sufferer said he wished to make no statement, and he told the magistrates that he was dying of consumption when he returned from Liverpool. They pressed him for particulars, but he courteously declined to give any further information.

When these gentlemen were gone, Philip Thompson said he would take no more medicine or nourishment, as he wished the bread and wine of the sacrament to be the last food to pass his lips. He said good-bye to his sister-in-law, kissed Lily and gave her his blessing, and bade Dick be kind to her. When he had done this he wrestled for a little while with the physical pain which oppressed him; but he was too weak to endure the agony long.

For some hours he lay unconscious. The day passed the meridian and waned, and the twilight fell upon the earth. Then he awoke, and looked again at those he loved, whilst the light still lingered in his eyes.

"Good-bye, my children," he said in a faint voice; "be happy together, and remember, throughout your lives, that one day we shall all meet again."

There was another attack of pain, a struggle, and then finally a parting between the soul and the clay. The body had done its duty, and the spirit, which had been prepared, by trials upon earth, for life in heaven, was soaring aloft unto the abode of bliss. The night was coming on apace, but the poet had gone hence unto a more glorious day, to meet the dear companion of a happy bygone time, where clouds cannot darken nor sorrows oppress.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE INQUEST.



In due course Dr. Robertson gave notice of Philip Thompson's death to the coroner, and that official held an inquest at the Court House in South-street. The jury-men went to the doctor's house to see the body of the deceased; and when they returned to the court, there were many persons

present waiting to hear the evidence.

Sir Henry George at once said: "The time has arrived when an arrangement should be made for questioning the witnesses. I understand that my learned friends, Mr. Frost and Mr. Holland, appear for the Crown, and Mr. Taylor for certain relatives of the deceased. Mr. Alderman Thompson has received notice

to appear, and it has been thought right, therefore, that he should be represented on this inquiry. He is represented by Mr. Colghan and myself, and I request that we may be permitted to ask any questions which may appear to us to be necessary in the interest of our client."

Mr. Taylor stated that Miss Lily Thompson and Mr. Richard Thompson, whom he represented, had been ordered to attend; and he asked that the privilege of questioning the witnesses might also be permitted to him. Mr. Frost expressed his desire that those who represented interests should be allowed to cross-examine the witnesses, and the coroner stated that this course should be adopted.

Dr. Robertson was then called by the coroner and sworn, and in answer to questions put to him by that officer he said:—

"The deceased died at my house on the thirteenth instant. I first saw him at the White Hart on the morning of the twelfth. He was suffering from consumption, and I considered that he could not live much longer. I told him so, and advised him to go to his friends. Excitement of any kind would be bad for a man in his condition, and I warned him of this when he informed me that he had a tiring day before him. He did not seem to pay much attention to my advice, and I could do nothing for him."

"I did not see the deceased again until the morning of the thirteenth, when I was called down to see him. Mr. Richard Thompson had brought his uncle to my house, and the deceased had then been wounded in the shoulder. I examined the wound, which, under ordinary circumstances, would not have been a dangerous one; but knowing the patient's condition, and fearing that it might prove fatal to him, I sent for Mr. Hunter, who has had much experience of wounds inflicted by firearms."

"We had no difficulty in extracting the bullet; but the patient's strength was exhausted, and at about six o'clock in the evening of the thirteenth instant he died, in the presence of Mrs. Thompson, Miss Lily Thompson, and Mr. Richard Thompson."

"I was present when the magistrates saw Mr. Philip Thompson; and I heard him refuse to make any statement. The magistrates informed him that some innocent person might be suspected of causing his death, in consequence of his refusal to answer their questions; but he only shook his head, and requested them to leave him."

"When I saw the deceased at the White Hart, I did not think he could live more than a few days; but I consider that his death was accelerated by the wound inflicted upon him. I cannot say how many more days or hours he would have lived had he not been wounded; I can only state with certainty that he would not have lived a week, and that going up to town, staying out of doors at night, and other causes of excitement were bad for him, and likely to hasten the end. The cause of death was acute phthisis, sometimes called galloping consumption. Its symptoms differ from those of ordi-

nary pulmonary consumption in the rate of progress; and softening of the tubercle, and the formation of cavities, do not always occur to any extent."

Mr. Hunter, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., was the next witness, and he stated that the wound would not have caused the death of a person in good health. In answer to Mr. Frost, he said it might have hastened the death of Philip Thompson, and that it probably did shorten the life of the deceased by a few hours. In answer to Sir Henry George, the witness said he could not swear that Mr. Thompson's death was accelerated by the wound.

Dick was then sworn, and in answer to a question put to him, he said, "My uncle told me that he had promised my father to go down to Romford."

Sir Henry George objected to this as hearsay, and it was rejected; but the coroner asked the question: "Did the deceased make a statement to you—yes or no?"

"Yes," Dick replied.

"In consequence of that statement did you do something?"

"Yes."

"What did you do?"

"I went down to Romford with my uncle, and I afterwards accompanied him to Havering Hall. My uncle asked me to stay in the carriage, but as I knew he was very weak, I thought he might require assistance, and I walked a little way behind him. I heard the report of a revolver; and I ran up, and found my uncle wounded on the ground. I carried him part of the way towards the gate, and with the driver's assistance put him in the carriage in which we had come to the Hall."

"I believe you once accused your father of forgery, and of marrying one Mary Smith, taking his brother's name at the time of the marriage," Mr. Frost said.

"I did," Dick answered reluctantly.

"What made you suspect him?" the counsel asked, playing with his brief, smiling, and turning away, as if the answer to the question was of no importance at all.

"Samuel Soper was the only surviving witness to the marriage, and the only witness to the will who could ever be found. Mary Smith, the other witness to the will, could never be traced; and Mary Smith, who was married to some person who gave the name of Philip Thompson, was at one time acquainted with my father."

"Had you any other reason for suspecting him?" Mr. Frost asked, looking at Dick now, and smiling again.

"Only the report of the inquest held on Mary Smith, and the signature in the parish register," Dick replied.

"You have no other reason for suspecting your father?" the counsel said in a loud and angry tone. "Remember that you are on your oath. Now do you mean to swear that?"

"I had no other reason then," Dick answered.

"Oh! you had no other reason then. Well, what other reason have you now?"

Dick hesitated.

"Come now, the Court cannot be trifled with. We want to know what reason you have now that you had not then?"

"Oh!" Dick replied, quickly, "Samuel Soper has also accused him of forging the will, I understand."

"And what else?" counsel asked, quite certain now that the witness had not told all.

Dick did not answer, and the coroner warned him that he was bound to reply.

"Mrs. Soper told me—"

"I object," said Sir Henry George. "We cannot have hearsay."

"Who is this Mrs. Soper who told you something?" Mr. Frost inquired in his most dulcet tone.

"She is the wife of Samuel Soper," Dick said.

"Oh! the wife of the gentleman you have been telling us about. And where does she live?"

"At the London Fever Hospital," Dick replied.

"A most desirable residence, no doubt," the senior counsel for the Crown remarked, to the amusement of the public and the bar; "but couldn't you give us a little information about her, without telling us what she said?"

"She married Samuel Soper the day before he was arrested. She is a nurse at the hospital," Dick replied.

"Her maiden name was—?"

"Smith," Dick said.

"And her Christian name?" counsel inquired.

"Mary."

"Mary Smith, then! Not the real Simon Pure, I suppose, eh?" counsel asked. Then as the witness did not reply, he continued, "I mean, she was not the Mary Smith who witnessed the will, was she?"

"There was no Mary Smith who witnessed the will," Dick replied quickly, without thinking.

"Oh! ho!" exclaimed the counsel, approaching as near to a whistle as such a learned gentleman could be expected to come. "Now, perhaps you will tell us why you are sure of this," he continued, playing with his brief whilst he spoke. Dick was sorry that he had spoken so quickly, and he answered, "I cannot explain without repeating to you what Mrs. Soper said to me."

Mr. Frost sat down, and Sir Henry George jumped up, and inquired in a most pleasant tone if Dick had not lately been convicted of assault. Dick acknowledged that he had; and then, still in a friendly way, the eminent counsel remarked, "And you struck your mother, did you not?"

"Accidentally," Dick replied.

"Oh! of course," said the eminent counsel, "quite an accident, of course! When gentlemen pick pockets now, or ladies commit larceny at the Co-operative Stores, it is only an accident, as a matter of course." The

learned gentleman had a little laugh, and then sat down as quickly as he had got up.

Lily was then called, and she was forced to give an account of what happened when her father left home. Sir Henry George asked her whether her father had not sent messages of goodwill to his brother from his death-bed; and she replied that he had done so. She also said that, in consequence of her father's instructions, she had sent her uncle a ring which had been his mother's.

The butler was next sworn, and he said that he was with his master after the alarm had been given on the morning of the 13th inst. He understood that a burglar had tried to enter the library of the hall, and that the alderman had fired a shot. They did not find the body of any person, but they heard somebody walking away, and when they had been listening a little while a carriage started from the gates. He noticed a large piece of glass on the tiled floor of the conservatory, but he could not swear that the piece produced was the same, though it looked like it.

There were no small pieces of glass on the ground, but only the one large piece, and he did not know how it came there.

The police-sergeant, who had seen the alderman on the morning of the 13th, gave an account of the interview; and he swore that the piece of glass produced was that

which lay on the floor of the conservatory when he called at Havering Hall. He had stuck a piece of paper on it, and had marked the paper; for he had considered it a suspicious circumstance that this should have been lying on the ground, unbroken. He examined the door, and he came to the conclusion that the window had been purposely broken, and that the piece of glass had been carefully taken out and placed on the floor. He thought so because the putty on the inside had not been removed, and he inferred that a blow was given to the pane whereby the piece of glass produced was knocked inwards, and that this was subsequently withdrawn from the window by lifting it upwards and a little towards the person removing it.

The alderman then volunteered to make a statement, and was consequently sworn. He said: "I am an alderman of the City of London, and one of the magistrates for the

liberty of Havering-atte-Bower. I saw my brother on the day he left London, and I advanced him the sum of £100 on the security of a novel. He told me I could do what I liked with it, and after he had left me I found that it was a red republican work, full of socialistic ideas. In spite of this, I took it to Mr. Pater-noster, and he offered me £250 for the copyright. I went home and destroyed the manuscript, intending to give £150 to my brother on his return. I had unwittingly undertaken to put a novel with a highly immoral and socialistic tendency into circulation, and rather than do this I preferred to pay my brother the value of the copyright out of my own pocket. I destroyed the manuscript in the interest of humanity at large, and I consider myself a public benefactor."

When the alderman had said this he looked round the court proudly, as if he wished to express by his manner, "That is the sort of man I am!"

"The reason why my brother left London, was because a woman, who called herself Mary Smith, claimed him as her husband. She had a certificate of marriage, and my late partner, Samuel Soper, declared that he was present at the marriage. My brother assured me that no such ceremony took place, but the evidence of the certificate and that of a witness was against him.

"As to the charge of theft, which it is said I

brought against my brother, it was all a cock-and-bull story, invented by Samuel Soper's lively imagination. He is a wonderful man for telling lies, and if he had only followed the trade of novel-writing, I am sure he would have beaten my brother out of the field. I asked him to break the news gently to my niece, but instead of doing this, he told her that her father would never return, and made up a tale about the theft. But he did not do this without a reason; he was in love with her, and he thought she would not consent to marry him unless she were humiliated. When he told me what he had done I was very angry with him; but he pleaded that all was fair in love and war, and he promised that he would turn over a new leaf in future, if he could only have a good wife to guide his footsteps into the path of righteousness. Samuel Soper was not a religious man, for he did not mind what he did on Sundays, and he seldom went to church. He could not



MR. ALDERMAN THOMPSON WAS REPRESENTED BY COUNSEL.

even plead the excuse that he was a Dissenter, as he never frequented any place of worship; and he sometimes said such blasphemous things about the ark and other passages in the Old Testament that he made my hair stand on end. I remonstrated with him, but it was of no use. I gave him good advice to no purpose, and I thought a well-brought-up and properly-regulated person, like my niece, might do him good in this world, and prepare him for a place in the next."

When the alderman had said this he paused, and looked round the court-house with a self-satisfied air; for he had come to the conclusion that the best thing he could do was to face the question boldly, and let people understand what a moral man he was.

"Samuel Soper duly proposed to my niece," he continued, "and I offered to give her a dowry. I did not wish her to marry my son, for though I liked the girl, I disapprove of marriages between near relations. My brother and I married two sisters, so the young folks were doubly cousins; and this I deemed an insuperable objection to their union. I am still averse to their marriage; and if I could prevent it, I would do so. I do not think that my niece was any more to blame than my son; they fell in love, and Lily would have nothing to do with Mr. Soper. As his conduct since then has shown that he only wanted money, and not a wife to be a moral guide and comforter, I am glad she refused his offer; but I do not think she was justified in leaving my house without telling me of her intention.

"I now come to my brother's return to London. I saw him at the station, and I was much surprised by his appearance. He told me that he wished to talk matters over with me, and I said I was willing to do so, but I made no arrangement to see him that night at twelve o'clock. I went up to London by train, and I expected he would either come to see me at my office in Bucklersbury, or else call at the Hall at a reasonable hour. I did not suppose for a moment that he would come in the middle of the night, or that he would walk in without knocking.

"I was going through some accounts on the evening of the twelfth, and I was much disturbed by the barking of a dog. It was a noisy brute, and I fetched a revolver and shot the beast. I returned to my work, and at twelve o'clock I was deep in my accounts. The conservatory door was opened, and some one entered. The revolver was close to me, and I took it up. I went into the conservatory, and a man came towards me. I was frightened, and without looking up—I fired.

"I am not a greater coward than other men, but I must own I was alarmed by the appearance of a midnight visitor. I called out 'Thieves!' and then ran to the hall, and sounded the gong. I soon returned with two of my servants, and we searched for the body, but we found no one there. We heard the gates close, and a carriage started directly afterwards; and we supposed that the burglar had made his escape. I gave notice to the

police; and the evidence of the police-sergeant, as to what was said, is substantially correct. I had a note from my son, saying that my brother was dying, and I asked my wife to go and see him. I went up to town, having business to attend to, and I proposed to see him in the evening. Unfortunately, my brother was then dead."

The alderman took out his handkerchief, blew his nose, and looked sorry; and then, as Mr. Frost rose to cross-examine him, the witness pulled himself up to his full height, and looked determined.

"Who was present when your father's will was signed?" the counsel inquired.

"My father, Samuel Soper, Miss Smith, and myself."

"Who was this Miss Smith?" counsel asked.

"I do not know. She came in to see my father, and stayed to witness the will. I never saw her before, and have not met her since," the alderman replied.

"Now did you know a Miss Mary Smith at Croydon, whilst you were a cadet at Addiscombe?" the learned counsel asked, whilst he pretended to be reading his brief.

"Yes," the alderman answered.

"Were your relations with her intimate?" counsel for the Crown continued, without looking up.

"I must decline to answer that question," the witness replied.

"And I must insist upon your answering it," counsel said, looking at the alderman fiercely.

"I must urge that it has nothing whatever to do with the case," Sir Henry George observed, "and consequently I object to the question. We are now inquiring into the circumstances attending the death of Philip Thompson, and we have nothing to do with a Miss Smith, who died more than twenty years ago."

But the coroner decided that the question should be answered.

"I forget what it was now," Alderman Thompson said, and the public who patronised this free entertainment laughed heartily.

"Were you upon intimate terms with Mary Smith of Croydon?" counsel asked, pressing his lips together in pleasant anticipation.

"I flirted with her, when I was a mere boy," the alderman replied.

"You did not marry her?" counsel inquired.

"No."

"Did she leave Croydon with you?"

"No."

"Did she ever live with you as your wife?"

"No."

"Your flirtation was an innocent one?"

"It was innocent, but foolish. I may have raised false hopes in her mind," the alderman said. "I regret this, for she went to the bad, though not through me."

"Did the supposed burglar threaten you in any way?" counsel asked.

"The person who entered was moving towards me, and so I fired. I should not have

done so if I had known that it was my brother."

Mr. Frost sat down, and Sir Henry George rose and said: "You fired the shot because you supposed that the person was about to attack you?"

"Yes," the alderman replied. "But I shall never cease to regret firing that shot to my dying day; and the only comfort I have, is the knowledge that my brother could not have lived any longer if he had not been wounded."

The coroner summed up the evidence, and the jury, after deliberating for about an hour and a half, returned the following verdict:—"We find that the deceased, Philip Thompson, died of consumption, and that his death was accelerated by a wound inflicted with a revolver by William Thompson; but there is not sufficient evidence to show whether William Thompson fired the shot by misadventure, or, if he did so, knowing that his brother stood before him, and with malice aforethought."

The alderman left the court with a melancholy countenance and concealed joy; and the verdict met with considerable animadversion from the public press as tending to cause suspicion, which could neither be verified nor refuted. On the same day the newspapers, which gave a report of the inquest, announced that the grand jury at the Central Criminal Court had returned a true bill against Samuel Soper.

CHAPTER XXIV. IN COURT.

TRIAL of Samuel Soper took place at the Central Criminal Court a few days later;

and the indictment charged the prisoner with forging a cheque, and with uttering the same, knowing it to have been forged.

Sir Henry George and Mr. Matthews conducted the prosecution, and the prisoner was defended by Mr. Montague Stephens. Sir Henry George stated the case for the Crown, and a clerk from the Metropolitan and County Bank then proved that the prisoner had cashed the cheque.

Mr. Alderman Thompson swore that the cheque was neither written nor signed by him, and he stated that he believed the handwriting was that of the prisoner. In answer to Mr. Montague Stephens, he said he did not marry Mary Smith, and that he never saw her after he left the military college. He had not read the report of the inquest held upon her body, and he did not remember where he lived in London, after he had left Addiscombe. Samuel Soper was under age when taken into the firm as a partner, and at that time he had not received a good education. The witness also admitted that the prisoner's ordinary handwriting was a wretched scrawl, and that, al-

though he had received a thousand a year for about twenty-five years, he had never really earned it, but had only been kept on out of charity.

The evidence of the policeman who had arrested the prisoner completed the case for the prosecution; and when the judge returned, after the adjournment for luncheon, Mr. Montague Stephens rose, and stated that his case was that Mr. Alderman Thompson wrote the cheque himself, and purposely made it appear a forgery, in order to have the prisoner arrested.

The certificates of the marriage and death of Mary Smith, the verdict of the jury which was empanelled to inquire into the circumstance attending the death of Philip Thompson, and a transcript of the shorthand-writer's notes taken upon that occasion, were admitted by Sir Henry George, and read.

Two experts, who had examined the cheque and had compared it with the alderman's handwriting, were of opinion that it was written by the prosecutor, and that certain letters had been made to imitate those of the prisoner. They said the clear clerky hand of the alderman, and a letter here and there somewhat similar to those found in the prisoner's wretched scrawl, gave the whole a very peculiar appearance. Several witnesses repeated the evidence which they had given before the coroner, and a banker's clerk proved that the prisoner had seven thousand pounds invested in marketable securities.

Mr. Montague Stephens, in an able speech, said that the prosecutor was not a man whose evidence could be trusted; he referred at some length to the statement which the prisoner had made to the magistrate, and to the evidence given at the inquest; and he urged that the evidence of the experts was altogether in favour of the prisoner at the bar.

Sir Henry George then replied on the part of the prosecution, and he said that the prosecutor was a man of high standing in the City of London, and one not at all likely to commit the crimes alleged against him. He reminded the jury that the prisoner was not liable to cross-examination, and that his statement was consequently not entitled to the same weight as sworn testimony; and he urged that, if they believed the evidence of the alderman, they would be bound to convict the prisoner.

The learned judge then summed up the evidence to the jury, and said: "Gentlemen of the jury, the case for the prosecution depends entirely upon the oath of the prosecutor, who has sworn that he did not write the cheque which the prisoner cashed. The experts, called for the defence, are of the opinion that the prosecutor did write the cheque; but his evidence is the best possible, provided that he has told the truth. You, however, must decide whether or not he is worthy of credit. It is strange that he kept the prisoner for five-and-twenty years, and paid him a salary of a thousand a year; for that is what the partnership arrangement really was. He admits that the prisoner did little for the money, and says he



A LIFE'S HISTORY.

kept the prisoner out of charity. He could have dissolved the partnership almost as easily as he could have dismissed a clerk; but did he keep the prisoner because he was afraid of an inquiry as to whether the late Edward Thompson's will was duly attested? If you believe that the will was not duly attested, you must reject the prosecutor's evidence, and then certainly there is not sufficient evidence to support a conviction. I must go even further than this. If you have any reasonable doubt as to the truth of any part of the prosecutor's evidence, you must decide in favour of the prisoner. He has a right to the benefit of any reasonable doubt, and should you find a verdict of not guilty, you will not necessarily be declaring that the prosecutor has been guilty of perjury. Gentlemen of the jury, you will now consider your verdict."

After a short consultation, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty, and the judge then ordered the prisoner to be discharged. This was done, and Samuel Soper went to his solicitor and counsel, and thanked these gentlemen for their able services. Meanwhile the alderman was complaining to his solicitor and to his counsel that they had not done all they could. He said that Sir Henry George might have obtained a verdict, had that eminent counsel made a more eloquent appeal to the jury; and Sir Henry George replied that it was the duty of counsel for the prosecution to assist in ascertaining the truth of the charges, and not to struggle for a verdict.

Just then a police officer approached the alderman and said, "I am Inspector Marshall. I must take you into custody for the wilful murder of your brother. This is a serious charge, and I caution you that whatever you say I must reduce to writing, and it may be given in evidence against you at your trial."

The alderman looked round fiercely at the speaker. "I am an alderman of the City of London, and a magistrate of the liberty of Havering," he said. His face was flushed at first, but it soon became pale.

"Have you a warrant, Inspector Marshall?" the alderman's solicitor asked.

"Yes, sir," the inspector replied, handing

the document to the solicitor. "I have my orders from Scotland Yard."

"You have no objection to my accompanying my client, I suppose?" the solicitor observed.

"None at all, sir."

"Very well; we will take a cab," Mr. Jones replied.

"As you like, sir; but I must come inside with you, and you must allow a policeman to ride on the box," the inspector said respectfully.

"I have no objection," the solicitor answered. "You will allow me to put up my papers in this case, and give them to my clerk?"

"Certainly, sir."

This was done, and then the alderman was taken to prison. In the cab he sat quite still, and did not speak a word; his face was pale and haggard, and he thought of death and the gallows, but his heart was so full of hatred and malice that he could not offer up a prayer.

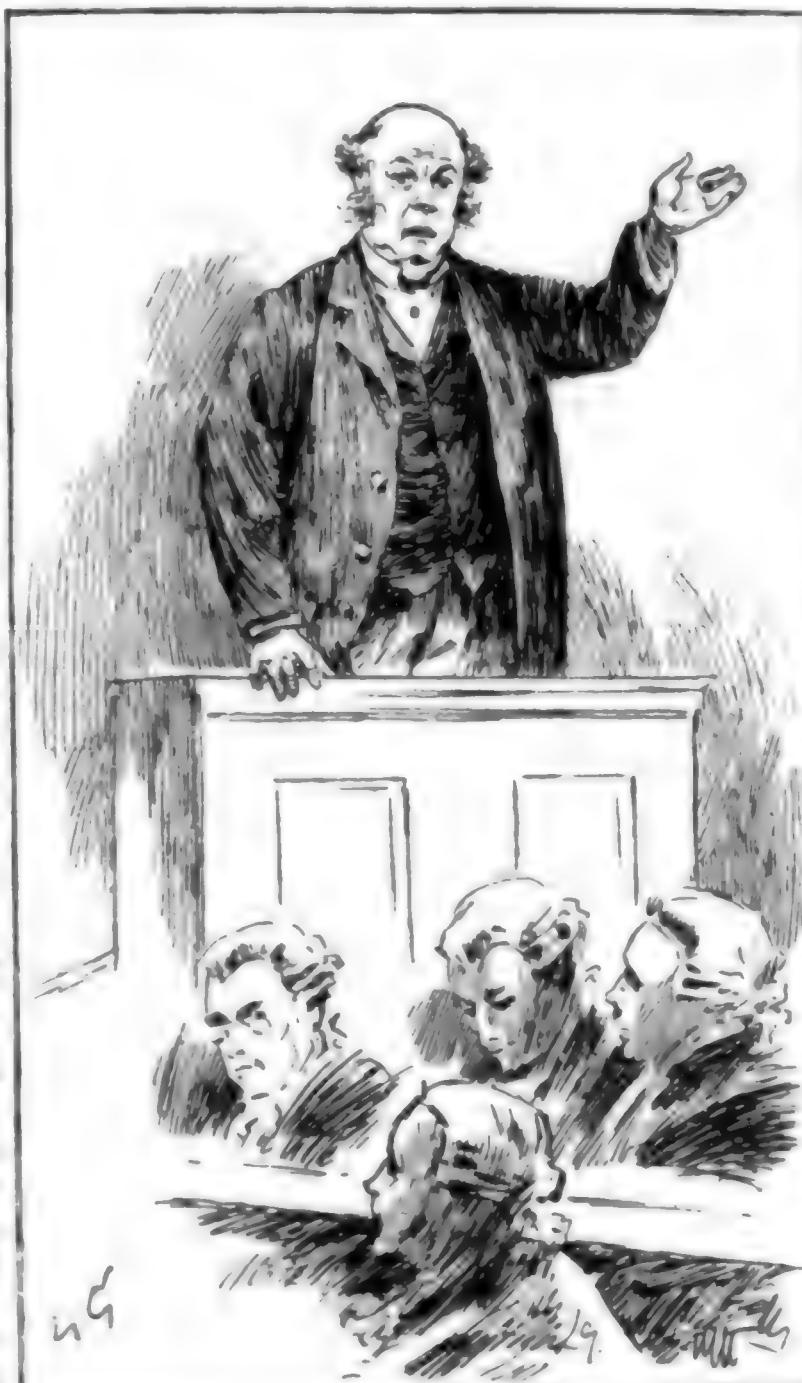
The windows of the cab had been pulled up, and he felt as if he were being stifled. Horror and fear, too, stupefied him; and he began to mutter that he was an alderman of the City of London, and that the insult offered to him was a wrong done to the Corporation.

At the prison the solicitor was allowed to see his client alone in a cell, and Mr. Jones asked the alderman if he wished to give any explanation which would throw some light upon the statement made by Samuel Soper, and thus enable counsel to prepare the defence.

"It's all a pack of lies," the alderman said; and then, remembering that he could not prove this, he began to curse and swear.

"If we only prove that some material part of Samuel Soper's statement is untrue, no jury will believe the rest. Now we must try to find out where your brother lived with this Mary Smith when he had married her, and obtain evidence to prove that he did live with her," the solicitor said. "We shall probably be able to learn, so you need not be uneasy."

"No one would like to be shut up here, waiting for trial on a capital charge," the alderman replied angrily.



THE ALDERMAN IN THE WITNESS-BOX.

"I am very sorry for you, and hope you will not be here long. But have you any idea where you were living after you left Addiscombe? Did you go to your father's house?"

"How should I know now?" the alderman exclaimed testily.

"Can you not think?" the solicitor asked.

"Not in this confounded hole," the prisoner replied.

"Now as to the will; who wrote that?"

"My father did," the alderman answered.

"Well, we must prove that by experts," the solicitor answered, "and we must employ detectives to learn where your brother lived with his wife."

The alderman did not reply; he thought that the less inquiry was made the better, but he did not say this, for he was determined not to acknowledge his guilt, even to his solicitor.

CHAPTER XXV.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?

A MAN was being tried for his life at the Central Criminal Court, and matrons and damsels of high degree, and the daughters and wives of City men, had come to witness the drama. The seats in court had been reserved, and tickets of divers colours had been issued. The City authorities were the responsible managers; and the judge was only one of the leading performers, and had nothing to do with the arrangements for filling the house.

It was the sixth and last day of the remarkable cause, *Regina v. Thompson*, and the excitement had been progressive. The accused was an alderman of the City of London, and he was defending himself, though he had a solicitor in court, and a counsel ready to argue any legal point which might arise. The case for the Crown had been concluded, and the evidence was strong against the prisoner; but some people considered the alderman a victim to one of those unfortunate combinations of circumstances which are often more embarrassing and more dangerous than guilt itself.

The prisoner was called upon for his defence, and leaning forward, he bowed slightly to the judge and jury, and then said:—

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—I stand here charged with the worst of all crimes; and I acknowledge that, if I were guilty of the murder of my brother, I should certainly deserve the punishment of death by the hands of the common hangman."

The alderman spoke firmly, but many of the women and some of the men present were now seen to shudder; whilst others, thinking of the black cap and excitement which a tragic ending to the trial would afford them, smiled hopefully, and then looked at the prisoner through their opera-glasses.

"You will be patient with me, I trust, whilst I give you all the particulars of this unfortunate case; for I alone can tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Not one of the witnesses has attempted to do more than forge one or two links in the chain with which the prosecution is striving to drag

me to the gallows; and Samuel Soper and his wife have wilfully perjured themselves.

"Samuel Soper was an honest man enough until he made the acquaintance of the courtesan who is now his wife. You know well enough what men will do for love when their worst passions are aroused. You may have read of young George Barnwell, whom a woman tempted as Eve tempted Adam. He murdered his uncle, who was his best friend, with the dagger of an assassin; but Samuel Soper, whose benefactor I am, is trying to condemn me to a far more terrible doom.

"Now we must try to ascertain who this woman is that has led Samuel Soper from the path of virtue; and her own evidence is the only clue we have. She was in a milliner's shop at Croydon; so was Mary Smith. Moreover, she was in the same shop as Mary Smith; and she has said that she was unduly intimate with the man Mary Smith married. Now, gentlemen of the jury, I say that she was Mary Smith, and that she did marry my brother." The prisoner said this in a loud voice, and the Attorney-General, Mr. Montague Stephens, and Mr. Colghan, who appeared for the Crown, were busy with their pens. The ladies, however, were not aware how important it was for the prisoner to prove that Mary and Samuel Soper had committed perjury, and they wondered what had suddenly excited the members of the legal profession who were in the court.

"According to her own evidence, Mary Smith received a letter of introduction to the matron of the London Fever Hospital, and Mrs. Soper presented this. She did more than present the paper: she lived under the name of Mary Smith for five-and-twenty years. The marriage register says that Mary Smith was married to Philip Thompson; and that, gentlemen of the jury, was the marriage Samuel Soper witnessed. My brother read an account of the inquest in the newspapers, and naturally supposed that his wife was dead, and he afterwards married my sister-in-law.

"Now, I am not much like my brother, as Miss Lily Thompson, who was called for the Crown, has admitted; and if, gentlemen of the jury, you will kindly look at the photograph, which the same witness has sworn is a portrait of her father, you will see that for yourselves. I was stouter a month ago than I am now; but the difference in size is still considerable. Now this woman, Mary Smith, having, as she says, married me, claimed my brother as her husband. She wanted to marry him again, you have learned from her letters; and if she is not Mary Smith, she is then an impudent impostor, altogether unworthy of belief.

"I now come to my late father's will. He wrote the document himself, and Mary Smith and Samuel Soper witnessed his signature. I was present at the time, but the woman wore a thick veil, and I could not possibly identify her. Mrs. Soper swore that Mary Smith went to Romford, and saw my father; and probably she again saw him that night at

the office. It may have been in consequence of this visit that the will was then made ; for Mary Smith may have made some accusations against my brother, and in consequence of this my father may have disinherited his eldest son.

"According to Samuel Soper, he and I allowed my father to die without assistance, in order that I might afterwards forge the will. Is this likely? I do not think Samuel Soper is quite as bad as he pretends to be. As yet, I believe, he has no man's blood upon his hands; and he has committed his first crime at the instigation of an immoral and unprincipled woman. He stated that my father was dead before the will was given him to sign as an attesting witness, and that he did so on an agreement that he should be taken into partnership. This tale was concocted by the wicked woman whom you have seen in the witness-box, where, without a blush upon her handsome face, she acknowledged her infamy.

"I will ask you to remember that accomplices, who levy blackmail, always increase their demands as their victims become richer. Would not Samuel Soper have required fifteen hundred a year after he had succeeded in obtaining a thousand? You, gentlemen of the jury, are men of the world; and, knowing something of human nature, will answer this question in the affirmative. Samuel Soper was once upon a time a youth of promise; but he has yielded to the fatal charms of an ensnaring siren, and I will now leave him to public obloquy.

"As to the evidence of experts, you, gentlemen of the jury, who are practical men, will know how to value that. A poorly paid writing-master will swear to anything for a valuable consideration; and I could have brought an army of scribes to swear whatever I wished, if I had not been an honourable man, with a reputation, which I am determined to maintain at any cost. You can send me to the gallows; but you can neither rob me of my conscience nor destroy my soul.

"Having now told you who they are that charge me with crime, and having exposed their tissue of falsehoods, I, who alone am able to do so, will tell you all the facts. When my brother returned from Liverpool, I saw him at the station, and he told me that he was anxious to talk matters over with me; but he made no appointment, and I understood that he would come down to Romford again at some time or other, or else see me in Bucklersbury.

"That night I was looking through some accounts, as I thought that Samuel Soper, who had robbed me of one thousand pounds by forgery, might have obtained other sums by embezzlement. In this I wronged him, and now I believe he was an innocent man until he met the woman, Mary Smith.

"The barking of a dog disturbed me, and I fetched a revolver and shot the beast. If it had not been for this unfortunate incident I should have been unarmed when my brother entered in so extraordinary a way. As it was,

when I saw him hastening towards me, I thought it was a burglar, and I fired the fatal shot.

"As to the glass, I cannot account for it. I have no doubt I could have obtained witnesses to say that the glass might have fallen without breaking, if I had tried; but I have told you the truth, and nothing more or less. As an Alderman of the City of London, it is my bounden duty to set the facts plainly before you, and urge nothing in my behalf which I do not believe to be true. The chain of circumstantial evidence may prove too strong for me to break; you may prefer to believe the evidence of an adventuress to the statement of a man of my position; but at any rate I shall not go hence with guilt upon my soul.

"Gentlemen of the jury, I have now dealt with the topics of this case to the best of my ability; and you will soon have the responsibility of finding a verdict. My brother was a good and honourable man; and if anyone had wilfully killed him, that person would certainly have deserved the punishment which the law inflicts upon murderers. The dread sentence of the law is necessary; for it has been found to deter criminals from committing the terrible crime for which alone it is inflicted. It is a great responsibility for men to be called away from their businesses, as you have been, in order to decide upon the issue of life or death; but it is a duty which we all owe to society, and I am sure you will do your best to return a just verdict. If you believe that I am guilty, I do not desire to live; I do not want to go out into the world suspected by my fellow-citizens. I would rather go hence, to appeal unto a higher and unerring tribunal."

There was loud applause as the alderman sat down in the dock; but this was at once suppressed, and the Attorney-General proceeded to reply on behalf of the Crown.

"The prisoner," the Attorney General began, "has thought it right to make an attack on Samuel Soper, and on the woman whom he misled by a promise of marriage when he was a student at Addiscombe. They have admitted circumstances which are not in their favour; and they would have scarcely have done this, if they had concocted their tale. The prisoner paid Samuel Soper a thousand a year for doing next to nothing; and Samuel Soper says the prisoner did this because the will was not duly attested. Taking all the facts into consideration, I think you may infer that the will was a forgery. In these days, uneducated youths do not become partners in large City firms whilst they are under age; and you must ask yourselves why the prisoner took Samuel Soper into partnership, and gave him a thousand a year. There is no evidence to support the suggestion that Samuel Soper was a good auctioneer; and the prisoner could easily have called witnesses to prove that Samuel Soper had conducted many auctions if this were true.

"I must now read to you the most important part of the evidence which the prisoner gave at the inquest. He said:—'The conservatory door was opened, and someone entered. The

revolver was close to me, and I took it up. I went into the conservatory, and a man came towards me. I was frightened, and without looking up I fired.'

"It is certainly not probable that the deceased would have entered if he had not found the door open, and the statement of the prisoner does not account for the fact that Mr. Richard Thompson found his uncle outside the conservatory. Did the deceased take several steps backwards after he was wounded, or did the prisoner go to the door and fire at his brother, who was waiting to be admitted ?

"This, however, is the more important question—did the prisoner fire the revolver knowing that it was his brother who stood before him? The prisoner may have made an appointment with the deceased, and he may have killed the dog in order to be able to account for having the weapon at hand. It is not proved that the dog barked, and if the dog had made much noise it must have been heard by someone else, and the prisoner could have called that person as a witness.

"Philip Thompson did not wish any punishment to be inflicted upon his brother, but the public safety demands that the criminal shall suffer for his crime. I must ask you, therefore, carefully to consider the facts of the case; and when you have done this, if you have a doubt as to the guilt of the prisoner, by all means give him the benefit of it. But if you come to the conclusion that the facts, proved by creditable witnesses, are not consistent with the innocence of the prisoner, I must ask you not to shrink from the duty which will then devolve upon you."

Although it was nearly one o'clock his lordship immediately began to sum up. He said :—

"Gentlemen of the jury,—It would be a very poor compliment to you, after the patient attention which you have paid throughout this protracted and anxious trial, if I were to remind you of the very solemn nature of the duty which you are now called upon to perform. This case is a pure question of fact, and not one of law ; for if the prisoner shot the deceased maliciously, then he is guilty of murder ; whilst if the prisoner fired the shot supposing that a burglar had entered his house and was about to attack him, then he has committed no crime. When a burglar attacks a person whose house he has feloniously entered, he is usually armed, and consequently the person attacked has a right to defend himself with any weapon he may have at hand. But if a man innocently enters a house by an open door, and does not attack the person he meets, then if that person kills the intruder without

malice or premeditation, he commits the crime of manslaughter : malice or premeditation would make the crime that of murder.

"Did the prisoner know before he fired the shot that it was his brother who stood before him? If he did know, he committed murder. The deceased was weak and ill, we are told on evidence that is not disputed ; and it is not likely that such a person would break into his brother's house after midnight.

"We must now consider what object, if any, the prisoner had for wishing his brother dead. If their father's will was not genuine, or if the prisoner supposed that the witness Mary Soper was his wife, and he wished it to be supposed that she was his brother's wife, then he would have such an object. Samuel Soper swears that he did not witness the signature of the testator, and that there was no woman at the office on the night when he put his signature as that of an attesting witness to that will. The experts have sworn that the will is in the

handwriting of the prisoner, that the signature of the testator was written by the prisoner with the pen turned to the left, and that the signature of Mary Smith is a clumsy imitation of a woman's angular writing. The testimony of experts is most valuable in cases of forgery ; and I have no doubt the prisoner would have availed himself of it, if he could have done so.

"Philip Thompson saw his brother at Romford station on the morning of the twelfth ; and that evening, accompanied by his nephew, he went down to see the prisoner. He left Mr. Richard Thompson in the carriage, and then he entered the grounds ; but whether he intended to break into the house of his brother, or

whether he went there by appointment, we can have no direct evidence to show. What the deceased may have said during the day as to his intentions is mere hearsay, and, as such, inadmissible ; but we do know that he was in a weak state of health, and consequently incapable of much exertion. According to the prisoner's statement, the deceased forced his way in ; and he afterwards advanced towards his brother. Supposing the statement to be correct, the deceased must have been some distance from the conservatory door when the shot was fired ; but then the body was found outside the conservatory, and the doctors say that the deceased must have fallen directly after the wound had been inflicted. Still, this is only theory, and it is possible that they may be wrong. But a large piece of glass was found unbroken upon the ground, and this is certainly very strange. You have heard several witnesses say that this must have been de-



MANY A LADY OF HIGH DEGREE HAD COME TO WITNESS THE DRAMA.

liberately taken out from inside ; but you must remember that this is only an opinion. It is also strange that a loaded revolver should be at hand ; and the explanation which the prisoner gives is not satisfactory. There is no evidence to prove that the dog barked that night more than usual ; and the only witness who spoke of the dog said that he did not hear much barking, though, for some time before the animal was shot, he was near the dog's kennel.

"These are the most important facts, and you have to consider if they are compatible with the innocence of the prisoner. You have a solemn duty to perform, for you must arrive at what you consider an honest and true conclusion from the evidence that has been given before you. If the guilt of the accused has not been proved, he is entitled to an acquittal; but if you believe that he certainly committed the crime imputed to him, it will be your duty to deliver an adverse verdict against the prisoner at the bar."

The jury retired to consider their verdict ; the judge went to luncheon ; and now eager faces turned towards the prisoner. The spectators in the back rows stood up to have a good view of the principal character in the drama which they had come to witness ; whilst those who were on the floor of the court stood on tip-toe to see the human being who, they expected, would soon be condemned to die.

The head of the guilty man drooped, and he feared that the judge's charge would cost him his life ; but people took out their provisions, their tumblers, their footless wine-glasses, and other picnic effects, and the merry audience made a hearty luncheon, enjoyed the exuberant gossip, and were troubled by no sad reflections.

The loud buzz of conversation and the shrill laughter of women were heard by the prisoner, and he was once seen to shudder when some light-hearted person spoke of the black cap. He had an interview with his solicitor in the dock, and he signed a document, which the public supposed to be a will. Then, whilst all round was excitement, bustle, and noise, a cry of "Hats off!" in the doorway by which the jury would enter produced an instantaneous hush. The judge, followed by sheriffs and aldermen, came in and took his seat ; the twelve jurors passed solemnly into their places in the box, and the prisoner scanned their faces eagerly.

It was only a respite, and there was to be no verdict yet. The jury wished to ask some questions and to be supplied with a copy of that part of the prisoner's evidence at the inquest which referred to the Mary Smith who witnessed the will, and the Mary Smith whom he had known at Croydon ; and when they again retired, the prisoner was also removed. After another hour had been spent in waiting for a verdict, the jury returned, and intimated that there was no possibility of their agreeing ; but Mr. Justice Lawking said that he could not then dismiss them, and in answer to an inquiry of the foreman of the

jury, he told them that they could have no refreshments.

The wretched prisoner was eagerly waiting for the verdict which would either leave him free or consign him for a short period to the condemned cell, and then to the hands of the common hangman. The chaplain went to him and offered him the consolation of prayer, but the murderer was too much concerned with the things of this world to pay any attention to the words addressed to him. But the daylight passed and the night came, and then he began to hope that neither this jury, nor any other, would agree to find him guilty.

The judge allowed a police surgeon to see one of the jurors who had been taken ill. The medical man found that the juror had taken little breakfast, and that he was faint for want of food ; but in consequence of the barbarous law of the land, which allows jurymen to be starved until they agree to a verdict, the surgeon could do nothing for his patient.

Three of the jurors, besides the sick man, were doubtful as to the guilt of the prisoner, whilst eight considered that his guilt had been clearly proved. But they were all hungry, and they agreed to decide the question of life or death by lot. They cut twelve pieces of paper of equal size, and wrote "Guilty" upon eight of these and "Not Guilty" upon the other four ; and they placed the papers in a hat, and the foreman drew out one of them. The jury then returned to the court, the prisoner was brought back, and the judge took his seat upon the bench.

The clerk of arraigns said : "Gentlemen of the jury, have you all agreed upon your verdict?"

The foreman replied : "We have."

The clerk of arraigns then asked : "Do you find the prisoner, William Thompson, guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty," the foreman answered.

The prisoner covered his face with his hands, and the warders who were standing by his side saved him from falling ; but when the clerk of arraigns addressed him, he had regained his composure, and stood erect with folded arms.

"Prisoner at the bar," the clerk of arraigns began, "have you anything to say why the court should not give you judgment according to law?"

"My innocence is the only reason why the sentence of the law should not be passed upon me," the prisoner replied. "If I were guilty I should deserve to die ; but God knows that I am innocent, and He will support me."

The chief usher demanded silence.

The judge having assumed the black cap, addressed the prisoner, and said :—

"William Thompson, the jury have convicted you of the crime of wilful murder, after having listened patiently to every argument which your ingenuity could suggest ; and the law commands me to pass upon you the sentence of death. It is not my desire to aggravate your feelings by recapitulating any portion of the details of your career, and I will only say that you are certainly guilty of the cruel, base, and

treacherous crime of which you have been convicted. It is not part of my duty to admonish you how to meet your doom ; but during the short term of life which still remains to you, I implore you to prepare for eternity.

" The sentence of the court upon you is that you be taken hence to the place whence you came, thence to a lawful place of execution, and that you be hanged by the neck until you be dead, and that your body be buried withia the precincts of that prison in which you were

last confined after the passing of this judgment upon you. And may the Lord have mercy upon your soul ! "

The chaplain, who had been standing near his lordship, said "Amen."

The men and women who had seemed heartless in the morning felt sorry for the prisoner, now that he had been condemned ; but an official, who had been polite to the alderman in the morning, now without ceremony hurried away the convict under sentence of death.



AN OFFICIAL, WHO HAD BEEN POLITE TO THE ALDERMAN IN THE MORNING, NOW HURRIED AWAY THE CONVICT UNDER SENTENCE OF DEATH.



CHAPTER XXVI.

CONDEMNED TO DIE.

FTER the verdict of guilty had been pronounced, City men, who had known William Thompson for years, wrote to the papers; and each mentioned some instances of the prisoner's kindness and generosity, and urged that there was not sufficient evidence to support a conviction. Persons of the highest rank who had dined with the convict, and conscientious individuals who objected to capital punishment, interested themselves in his behalf; and it was the opinion of many, that an innocent man was about to be consigned to a shameful death.

At the election of the Lord Mayor of London, the liverymen gave the prisoner a large majority of their votes; but the aldermen who had passed the chair, decided to appoint the only other candidate. This decision was not favourably received by the members of the livery companies; and several of the senior aldermen deemed it advisable to state that they were convinced of Mr. Thompson's innocence. They assured the liverymen that they would gladly have elected him, if his conviction had not vacated his seat on the board of aldermen, and rendered it impossible for him to fill any municipal office; and a petition was then drawn up by the City solicitor, and signed by every person present.

The senior member for the City introduced a deputation, which waited upon the Home Secretary; and upon this occasion many petitions were presented. But the Home Secretary had an interview with the judge, and he afterwards replied to the deputation by letter, saying that he saw no reason why the law should not take its course. Still, the friends of the ex-alderman would not accept this decision as final; and public meetings were held, and much money was spent by the City authorities, who were anxious to obtain a pardon.

Time passed all too quickly for the prisoner, and Lord Mayor's day came, and no reprieve had been received. The murderer was to die upon the morrow, and he was sitting in his cell, thinking of the dread sentence of the law. The convict had refused to see either his wife, his son, or his niece; but before Sir Jonas James joined the procession which was to start from the Guildhall, he asked the prisoner to give them an interview. The worthy knight said that the committee in the City, which was trying to obtain the prisoner's release, wished Lily and Dick to be ready to plead for mercy to the Home Secretary, if such a course should be necessary; and he told the unhappy man that the exertions of the committee might yet be crowned with success.

The prisoner's refusal to see his relations was owing to his fear that they would deem him guilty; but now that they might be of service to him, he sent for his son and his niece. Lily and Dick came, dressed in black; and

the convict resented this, thinking that the mourning was for him, and not for his brother, whom he had never deemed of any importance. He told them what he wished them to do, but neither Lily nor Dick was sanguine of success, and the young man begged his father to be prepared for the worst.

"You can plead with all your eloquence in the interests of justice and humanity, for you know that I am innocent," the condemned man said.

Neither Lily nor Dick spoke; for they did not possess the courage, with which the knowledge of the prisoner's innocence would have inspired them.

"What!" exclaimed the ex-alderman, "have my own children forsaken me? I have struggled for them. I have toiled for them, and I have made a fortune for them; but they wish me to be hanged, that they may sooner enjoy the wealth which I have accumulated for their enjoyment. O gold, you are a cursed thing, a cursed thing! If I had only laboured to win the love of God, as I have toiled to win this dross for my children's sake. He would not have left me here to die a vile death by the common hangman's hands!"

The tears rolled down the prisoner's cheeks, and he wept and swore, wishing that he had never been born in so vile a world as this, which he was so loth to leave. He cursed his son and his niece because they believed him guilty, as he knew he was; and they were silent, pitying the prisoner, and praying for him.

"Aunt is very anxious to see you, uncle William; and she, at any rate, believes that you are innocent," Lily said after a little while.

"She would only make a scene," he answered.

"Indeed, she would not. She wishes to pray with you," Lily replied.

The clock struck.

"Can prayer give me back the hour of my life that has passed?" he asked, with a ghastly smile upon his face.

She did not answer this question, but she took her uncle's hand, as a sign of her good will.

"Lily," the condemned man asked, "will you marry Dick, if they hang me?"

"Yes," she answered; "I have promised to be his wife."

"If you marry him, people will have nothing to do with you; and they will point you out to one another in the streets, as the woman who married the son of her father's murderer," the prisoner said.

"Narrow-minded people may do so," she answered, "but that will not matter to us."

"Dick," said his father, speaking in the dictatorial voice which he had often employed in the days of his prosperity, "you are not generous. If you really loved Lily, you would not marry her. The son of a man hanged by the common hangman, has no right to bring down the disgrace and ignominy under which he labours, upon the head of an innocent girl, ignorant of the world and its usages."

"I will release Lily from her promise if she wishes it," Dick answered slowly and sadly.

"I do not wish it," Lily said sorrowfully.

"Do you think a girl of spirit, like Lily, would ask you to release her from the promise she made you?" continued the convict. "Not at all; she would hold you to your promise for your own sake. She's a plucky girl, and I admire her; but as for you, sir, who would bring degradation upon her noble brow, I disown you. I cannot claim you as my son, for we Thompsons were always men of honour."

"Dick has promised to be my husband, and he will keep his word," Lily said, for she knew that her cousin would rather sacrifice his own happiness than marry and degrade the woman whom he loved. She loved him with all her heart; and, for his good, she would hold him bound by his pledged word.

"Father," said Dick, "do not try to part us. Give us your blessing, and God may help us in our endeavours to save you. Pray to Him for help, either in life or in death."

"I do not wish for help in death!" the prisoner exclaimed. "I want to live!"

"God may help you yet. Pray for His assistance in the hour of your need," Dick said solemnly.

Lily took Dick's hand, and she showed him by a sign that it was her wish that they should kneel down in prayer. The young couple did so, but the prisoner stood for some time with a proud defiant look upon his careworn face. Then the young girl repeated the words:—

"If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

The words gave the condemned man some hope; if their prayers were heard, he might be free; and though he had no confident belief in the truth of the Bible, he thought it was worth while to pray.

The prisoner knelt down, and when they had ceased praying, he shook hands with his son, and kissed Lily on the forehead.

"Throw yourself on your knees before the Home Secretary; plead to him; Lily, as if it were your own life or Dick's for which you asked; and don't let him leave you," he said.

"We will do our best," Lily answered.

The gaoler had opened the door, and the convict said, "Good-bye, and God bless you!" But directly the door was locked, he sank back upon his seat, and began to groan.

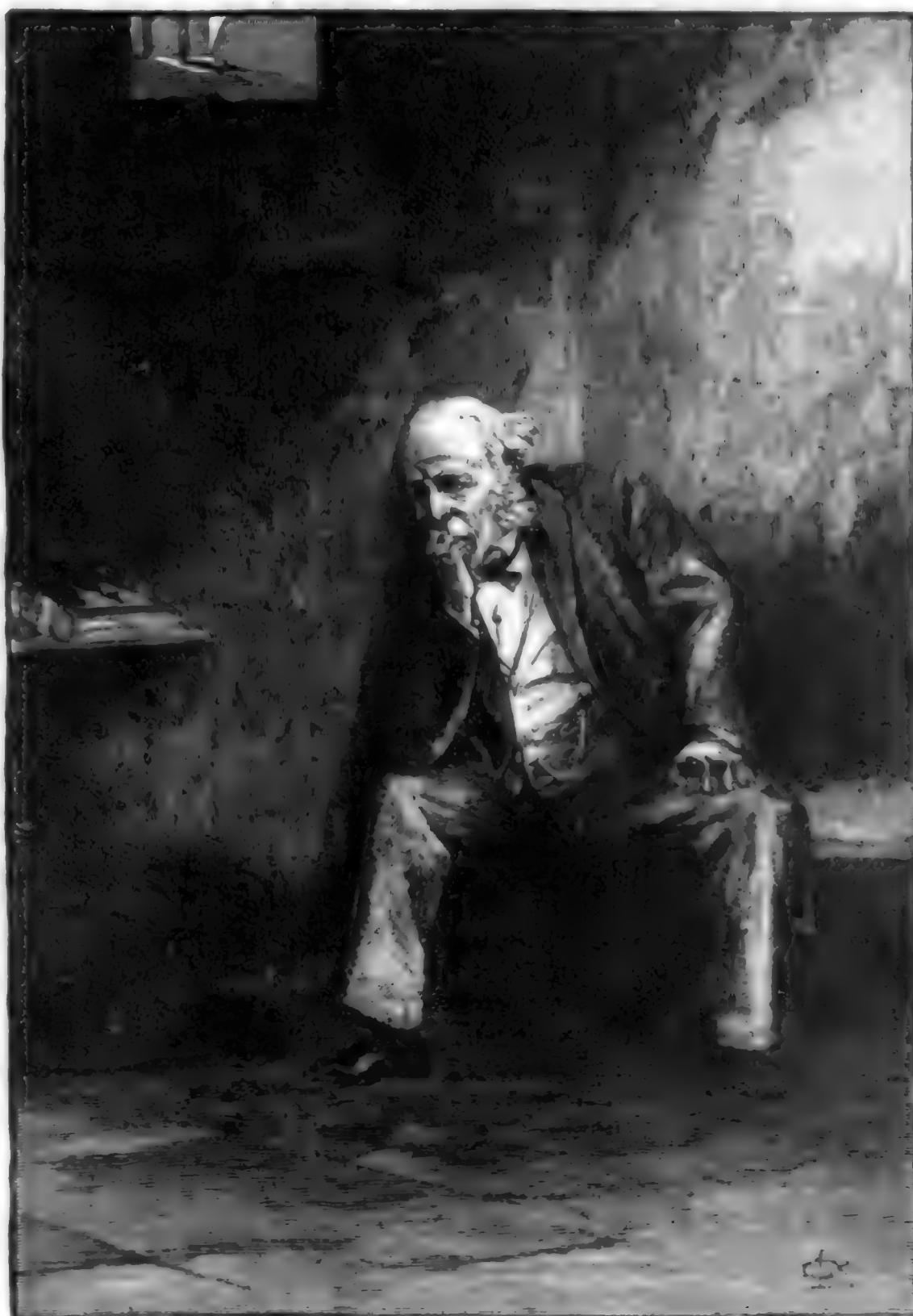
He thought of the execution of the dread sentence of the law; and he swore, and cursed, and screamed, and then rolled grovelling on the floor.

An hour later Mrs. Thompson entered the prison, and men were then engaged in putting up the gallows. She showed the order of the sheriff, by which she was entitled to pass the night with her hus-

band; and the gaolers allowed her to enter. She crossed the prison court with the turnkey; and this man unlocked the door of the condemned cell to admit her.

It was nearly dark, and for a little while she, poor woman, did not see her husband; and when she found him upon the floor, she had to touch him upon the shoulder to attract his attention.

"Let me alone," he moaned. "It is not time to take me away yet. Let me alone, I say. I am an alderman of the



IN THE CONDEMNED CELL.

City of London, and nobody shall murder me."

"It is I, William," she said. "I have come to see you in your trouble."

"William," she repeated in a tone made stronger by irrepressible emotion, "it is I, your wife, who have come to pray with you."

"Go and save my life," he answered, still lying on the floor. "Go and save my life: I don't want anything else done, but I cannot die like a dog."

"I cannot save you, William," she answered, "but I will stay with you, and pray with you to the end."

"Pray away," he said with a little sneer. "I have tried it; but no reprieve has come. Still, you may try your hand; but you're no saint, and I don't expect there'll be any more notice taken of your prayers than of mine."

"I was not always a bad woman, William," she answered. "When you began to beat me, I took to drink; and when I had once taken to it, I could not give it up. But you will forgive me now, William, will you not?"

"That does not matter a button to you now. I am a felon, and I cannot alter my will. You have a life interest, and I cannot take it away, do what I will. The law looks upon me as a dead man already, and it will be no legal fiction soon," he cried in despair.

"I do not want your money, William," the sorrowing wife replied. "I never asked you for the money, and I will do with it whatever you wish. I only ask you to forgive me for my past offences, and to let me pray for you."

After a momentary pause, Mrs. Thompson knelt down by her husband, and raised his head and rested it on her knees. Then their eyes met, and the face of the husband bore a look of wild despair, whilst that of the wife was full of a sad, yearning love.

"Our Father, which art in heaven, have mercy upon this poor captive, who is innocent of the crime for which he is condemned to die. Mercifully interpose, and save his life."

"Drop that," said the husband. "Pray for me as if I were guilty. Pray away, and get me the reprieve quickly, or I shall be dead with fright."

"Why should I pray for you as if you were guilty?" she asked.

There was a solemn pause.

"Good God!" she exclaimed, as the thought took possession of her mind. "You are not guilty?"

"Don't you trouble as to whether I am guilty or not guilty. They know everything up there, and there's nothing to be gained by putting in a false plea. Just pray, and save me before it is too late."

"William," she said again, "you are not guilty?"

He did not say a word, and there was a long pause; and then she wept bitterly.

"God forgive you," she said at last, when she had recovered her power of speech. "God have mercy upon your soul!"

"God spare my life," the wretch upon the ground now said. "I want time to repent. I

cannot die as I am; I dare not. Go on praying that I may live."

"God of mercy," she prayed, "give him time to repent of his sins."

"O God," he moaned, "will nobody help me? Am I to be left to die that horrible death? I am a heavy man, and my neck will not bear my weight, and they ought to take that into consideration. But they want to strike a blow at the Corporation, and they're going to hang me at the commencement of what should have been my year of office as Lord Mayor."

"I wish I might die instead of you," she said.

"I wish so, too," he replied. "But your prayers are of no good," he continued. "You see they don't send me a reprieve."

"You know that I love you, William?" she asked.

"Yes. You have been a good wife to me; and I will love you ever so much, if you will only save me."

The wife was silent. The tears ran down her cheeks, but he did not know that she was weeping; and had he known, he would not have cared.

The clock struck the hour, and he became more violent. He rolled about upon the ground, and now and then he knocked his head against the stones. He would have killed himself to save his body from the clutches of the vile executioner, if he had not lacked the necessary courage. He thought of dashing his head against the stone wall with all his might, but fear of pain prevented him from making this attempt to deprive the law of its human prey.

The chaplain of the gaol came to the condemned cell, and he told the poor wretch of the repentant thief.

The ordinary was an unaffected, orthodox Church of England divine, and he deemed it his duty to offer the condemned man the consolation of religion. But the wretched convict would not listen to the chaplain's exhortation.

"I want to live. I can't get faith in time," he muttered. "Pray that my life may be spared."

"Come, come," the clergyman said hastily to the wretched criminal, "you must prepare for death. You have no time to spare, for you are to die to-morrow morning at eight o'clock."

The miserable man rose, and uttered a blasphemous curse; and then, furious with rage and despair, he aimed a heavy blow at the divine.

The chaplain hastened away from the dangerous lunatic, and before long he was in a hansom, on his way to the Guildhall. Meanwhile, the miserable man had fallen heavily to the ground, and the blood was running down his forehead. He was foaming at the mouth, and he gnashed his teeth, and bit his tongue, as he struggled convulsively.

His wife tried to soothe and comfort him, but he struck her when she approached him. He nearly succeeded in putting his hands



"WILLIAM THOMPSON, THE HOME SECRETARY HAS CAREFULLY INVESTIGATED YOUR CASE."

round his wife's neck, and had he done so he would probably have strangled her. She screamed, when she noticed what he was trying to do ; and when a warder entered the cell, she asked him to fetch a doctor.

When the prison surgeon came, he took off the convict's collar ; and when the paroxysm was over, he said, " It was an epileptic fit. I cannot do anything more for him ; he will be all right to-morrow morning." Then the doctor went away, and the poor woman was again alone with the wretch whose avarice had brought him to destruction. His features were livid, swollen, and distorted ; and he lay there upon the ground, insensible, and doomed to die.

There had been a time, when the poor woman had deemed her husband noble, good, and true ; but now she knew that his hands were stained with his brother's blood, and that he was a mean, cowardly villain, afraid to die. Still, as she heard the clock strike the hours which brought him nearer to the gallows, she prayed unto the Great Judge for mercy and forgiveness. She pleaded again and again that he might be allowed time to repent of his manifold sins and iniquities.

Her agony was so great that her mind almost succumbed under its burden ; and there was scarcely any sign of life in her pallid cheeks and closed eyelids.

At last the day dawned. Then she noticed a Bible which had been left for the condemned criminal, and she opened it at a passage which inspired her with hope. She read for a little while ; and then she prayed that her husband might yet repent, before it was too late. She was afraid that he would die as he was, in a

state of drowsy insensibility, caused by the fit ; and she wished, oh ! so much, to be able to read to him. But the clock struck again, and still he lay upon the ground.

She tried to rouse her husband ; and she succeeded just before the chaplain entered the cell. The reverend gentleman exhorted the wretched convict to spend in prayer the few minutes which still remained to him ; but even now the condemned man would only pray that his life might be spared.

" You must fix your hopes upon another world, whilst there is yet time," the chaplain said.

" I cannot die," the miserable wretch answered. " I must have time to repent of my sins."

The clergyman again reminded him of the sinner who was pardoned upon the cross ; and then the hangman and several officials entered the condemned cell. The wretched convict moaned and groaned.

" Do not touch me !" he exclaimed, as the hangman p'aced a hand upon his shoulder.

" I won't hurt you more than I can help, but I must touch you," the executioner replied, as he began to pinion the murderer.

Those who were to take part in the sad procession to the gallows, were waiting for the governor of the gaol ; but when the clock had struck eight, the chaplain began to read the burial service. Then the convict fell to the ground, determined that they should drag him to the place of execution, if no reprieve came. But directly the governor had entered the cell, he asked the prisoner to rise ; and the executioner lifted the prisoner from the ground.

" If there be a God in heaven," the prisoner

exclaimed, "He will save me from that devil."

"William Thompson," said the governor, "it is my duty to inform you that the Home Secretary has carefully investigated your case. After a long and patient inquiry, during which everything that could be urged in your favour was placed before him, he has come to the conclusion that there is just cause for a reasonable doubt, and in consequence of this you are pardoned."

"Thank God!" the awe-stricken man fervently exclaimed, as the governor handed him a pardon, and his wife fell, fainting, to the ground.

CHAPTER XXVII. IN DISTRESS

MR. THOMPSON was silent for some time after he had left the prison, and he passed through a crisis of feeling almost too violent for his weakened frame to support. He remembered that he was now a dishonoured man, at any rate in the sight of the woman who had been his humble servant; and now that his life was no longer in danger, the remembrance of his confession to her caused him deep regret.

To avoid the station, where he was likely to meet many of his acquaintances, he engaged a hansom to take him and his wife to Romford; and he pulled his hat down over his forehead to hide his face. He shrank from the observation of the multitude in the street, though he knew that, sooner or later, he would have to face his fellow-men; and, sitting in anguish by the side of the woman in whose power he had placed himself, he wondered what course she would pursue. But when the cab had left behind the streets in which he was most likely to be recognised, he partially recovered from the effects of the shock which both body and mind had suffered.

"The servants will be surprised to see me, will they not, my dear?" he said, turning towards his wife, and forcing a smile.

Mrs. Thompson looked at him severely. For some weeks she had accustomed her thoughts to the possibility, that her husband might suffer the extreme penalty of the law; but during that time this loyal wife had never deemed him guilty of the crime of which he had been convicted. She had loved him for more than twenty years, and had found excuses for his faults; and now, although she knew that he was a murderer, she could not make up her mind to desert him in his distress.

"If you were not with me, my dear," he continued, "I dare say they would take me for a ghost."

"It hurts me very much to hear you speak so lightly," she answered. "God in His great mercy has given you time for repentance; but, with that weight of guilt upon your soul, you must be prepared to learn that the way of transgressors is hard."

"You, at any rate, should believe in my innocence," he exclaimed.

His wife looked at him again, and seeing his look of determination, she became aware that it was his intention to go on leading the same old life of sin. She did not reprove him, though her sense of inferiority to her companion had now altogether passed. She did not suppose that he would be able to evade disgrace, though she understood that it was his intention to pretend to be innocent; and she thought it probable that he would have to go abroad. She knew very little about foreigners, and in her mind she classed them all together as undesirable persons, who ought to be avoided by all respectable people on account of their levity and their proneness to sin.

When they reached Havering Hall, the guilty man's knees trembled, and his usually florid face was deadly pale. He offered a hand to his wife to assist her in alighting; but she thought of the murder, and shrank from him. The servants were dressed in mourning, and they had left the blinds of the house down; for, until the arrival of their master, they had supposed that the sentence of the law had been carried out. They stared at the pardoned convict, whilst Mrs. Thompson was paying the cabman; and then some congratulated him upon his escape, and some welcomed him home again, but not one of them offered him any assistance. His wife, too, stood aloof from him, though she saw that he had scarcely sufficient strength to walk without support.

Directly he was seated in the library, she hastened to her room, and locked herself in. She wanted time to become accustomed to her new position, for she was anxious to do her duty, however repugnant this might be unto her will. Her love lay dying in her heart; life with her husband, she knew, meant misery; but husband he was still, in spite of all his crimes; and her heart began to beat wildly, as, with reawakened alarm, she thought of a wife's submission to such a man. Still, to forsake such a sinner, and to leave him, unwarned, to follow his evil ways, was a course which did not seem justifiable to the simple, Christian woman; and she blamed herself, too, because in the past she had neither won his confidence nor guided his footsteps into the way of truth.

It was easy now for her to see what she should have done, and what she should have left undone; but it was difficult to decide what steps she should take to remedy her faults of omission and commission, and she needed time to become accustomed to her sad self-knowledge, and to prepare herself to walk steadily in the path which was now to be allotted to her in consequence of her past sins.

Meanwhile, in the library below, the murderer sat in sad perplexity. Self-contemplation was not a habit of his; but he was wont to act only on well-considered reasons, and now that he wished to win the approval of men of the world, he had carefully to weigh facts as they regarded himself, and to think how he should turn them, in order that they might offer their best side to others. He shrank from the condemnation of his fellow-men, as from a

climate to which he could not adapt himself; and he was annoyed to find that his body was weak, and that his mind lacked its usual vigour.

Whilst he was trying in vain to form some plans for his future conduct, the butler entered the library, bringing some lunch on a tray. "We are all glad to see you back, sir," the man said; but he did not seem as humble as usual, and he made his employer nervous by staring.

"I made a affidavit, as I daresay you've heard say, sir," he continued. "I could not be quite sure what I did, that night, I was in such a tremor like, knowin' that there were burglars in the 'ouse; and when I considered the matter a second time, I wasn't altogether sure that I 'adn't taken that piece of glass out of the door with my own 'ands. If it were likely to fall out of itself, it was only my duty as I done; and long afterwards it came back to me, in a dream like, that I 'ad done it."

Mr. Thompson knew that the man was lying, and that the fellow believed Philip Thompson's death to have been the result of a deliberate design. He did not wish to be suspected by high or low, and he would have resented the suspicions of this lackey had he dared. But it was a better policy, he thought, to let the man dream in his favour; and pompously he said that he was gratified to hear that the servants were all glad to have him back; and he told the butler, in a lower tone, that the dreamer deserved and should receive a reward.

The proud man's sufferings were not over, for no pardon could give him back the respect of his fellow-men.

One last effort he was determined to make to recover his lost position, and when he had taken some brandy and water he was less despondent. But the day passed slowly; and then, sitting alone at the long dinner-table, he felt very wretched. He was fond of rich food and fine wines; but, though his cook had endeavoured to please him, he did not eat with his usual appetite, and, though he drank champagne of a famous vintage, the wine afforded him no pleasure.

He sat at the table a long time, however, trying to think of the future; but his mind was not clear, and it was a relief to him, when his solicitor was announced.

"I am very glad to see you again," Mr. Jones said, laying some emphasis on the last word; and though this reference to his escape displeased Mr. Thompson, he did not think it wise to show resentment.

"My innocence and the approbation of mankind supported me, whilst I was passing through this terrible ordeal; and now that I am about to take my place again as an alderman of the City of London, I feel very grateful to my fellow



SHE WAS ANXIOUS TO DO HER DUTY, HOWEVER REIGNANT THIS MIGHT BE UNTO HER WILL.

citizens who rallied round me in the time of my distress." In the hope that he might thereby more easily convince the solicitor of his sincerity, the auctioneer spoke magniloquently, and every now and then he waved his right hand, as he was wont to do when addressing a public assembly; but he was in a state of nervous perturbation, caused by bodily infirmity, and his voice lacked its usual vigour.

"Even if a man has been acquitted by a jury, some persons will shake their heads

wisely, as if they could say something, if they only would," the solicitor answered. "They won't be convinced against their wills; and many persons like to think that some great man has committed crimes, of which they never would have been guilty. Of course, I must admit that the evidence is against us; and only you can know the truth. But I do wish neither of us had ever heard the name of Soper; and, between ourselves, I may say that I've been blamed for obtaining affidavits from the witnesses who gave evidence against you at the trial. People remark that this course wasn't in accordance with professional etiquette; and I can't say that I'd like to make this case a precedent. But if I had not persuaded your butler and Mrs. Soper to modify their statements, you would have been hanged, and there wouldn't have been much etiquette about that."

"No one shall blame you, Jones, I will answer for it," the auctioneer said, trying to speak boldly. "I will stand by you; and it shall be known that you saved an innocent man, when he stood at the foot of the gallows."

"I may as well tell you what has happened," the solicitor answered sharply; for he was not well pleased with the patronising tone of the man, whom he believed to be guilty of a cruel murder.

The auctioneer asked the solicitor what he would take; and when each had some brandy and water before him, Mr. Jones continued:—

"Soon after your conviction, the son of one of the executors of your father's will of 1853, who had a small interest in proving that document, gave us notice that he required us to obtain probate in grand form of the later will, under which you are sole legatee. This we cannot refuse to do; and your wife, acting as executrix under the will you signed in the dock, agreed not to deal with your estate until the Court of Probate gives its decision. In order to obtain probate, in grand form, of the will upon which we rely, it will be necessary to place one attesting witness in the box; and though Samuel Soper is a hostile witness, we shall be bound to call him. What weight will be given to his evidence, I cannot say; but if the decision is against us, the will of 1853 will be admitted to probate."

"Why, that would mean ruin!" the auctioneer exclaimed. "But they cannot do that, unless they convict me of forgery!"

"Miss Lily Thompson is unwilling to take criminal proceedings against you, and in any case it would rather be in the interest of our adversaries to prosecute you for perjury. They would have to prove less, and a verdict against you would have the same result."

"Virtue and perseverance must in the end be victorious over slander and the iniquities of men," the auctioneer said with a sneer on his pallid face.

"The executor's son, Miss Thompson, and Mr. Richard Thompson, are all innocent of crime; and unless we can prove that the will,

upon which we depend, was duly attested by Samuel Soper and Mary Smith, the Court will be against us. Popular feeling has already turned; for, though you were deemed a martyr whilst you were under sentence of death, there are a good many persons who think that you should not have got off scot free."

"I prayed that my innocence might be established, and I have triumphed over my enemies," Mr. Thompson replied. The words were what might have been expected from him, but he did not speak with his wonted energy.

"All we have done is to raise a reasonable doubt as to the justice of the verdict. Certain persons raised cheers for you as the Lord Mayor's procession was passing between the Guildhall and the Law-courts, but malicious persons have come forward to declare that they were paid to do this; and it is quite possible that they did receive something for their services. At the Guildhall, after the usual toasts, your health was proposed; and the scene, which followed, I shall never forget. Glasses were clashed, some persons cheered, some tried to speak, and one facetious gentleman produced a black banner, on which there was a griffin and a skull and cross-bones. When at last silence was restored, the Home Secretary spoke. He said the judge who presided at the trial was satisfied with the verdict, and he went on to say that you ought either to be pardoned or hanged; but here he was interrupted by an uproar, and his voice became inaudible. When order was restored, he spoke of the need of a Court of Criminal Appeal, and said that it was his intention to leave the Guildhall immediately, in order that he might again consider the evidence, and listen to anything which might be urged in your behalf."

"And I know the result."

"But you do not know that the judge was called up in the night and brought from Egham; that Mr. Justice Lawking urged that the affidavits did not raise a doubt in his mind as to your guilt; and that at six o'clock this morning the governor of the gaol and the sheriff were informed by messengers that your case was still under consideration at the Home Office, and that the sentence was not to be executed until a final message was despatched. I was up all night, and at ten minutes to eight I was told that you were pardoned."

"What would you advise me to do now?" the auctioneer asked.

"If I were you, I should retire to Boulogne. You must agree to the terms accepted by Mrs. Thompson, and then I do not think anyone will prosecute you for perjury or forgery. Our opponents have a good case, and do not wish to harass you; but I would let you know if it should seem advisable for you to go further away for the benefit of your health."

"I am an alderman of the City of London, and you of all men should not deem me guilty," the auctioneer replied angrily.

"I am not certain about your being an alderman, but I am sure that my advice is sound. I think you will have to seek re-election, if you

still wish to represent the ward of Cheap; and if you are wise you will not run the risk of rejection. People are asking already why a rich man should escape with impunity, when a poor labourer or artisan would certainly have been hanged; and it is not the custom of the Home Office to pardon criminals when the doubt as to the justice of the verdict is so slight, even though the convict is either innocent or deserving of death. The law is logical, but practice is not; and if your sentence had been commuted to penal servitude for life, few persons would have complained."

"I am an innocent and injured man," the murderer answered. He had risen from his chair, and he looked upwards, as it he wished to summon a divine witness to the truth.

"I have brought some papers relating to the criminal trial, the pistol, and some other articles which were returned to me by the police to-day. If you are really innocent of all crime, I advise you to stay and risk the result; but, for my own part, I have little hope. Good evening."

The auctioneer took up the pistol. He knew now that his reputation was lost, though his life was spared; and a chill seemed to pass from his heart and to extend to all his frame. Courage he had none; and he feared that the insult he had just suffered, was only a foretaste of coming bitterness.

Presently he heard his wife's footstep outside, and he immediately determined to try to win her compassion. He grasped the pistol, but he did not look up when she entered. She saw him in his misery, and pity and tenderness immediately flowed from her gentle heart. She could not bear to see him bending low his guilty head; and putting a hand upon his shoulder, she said, solemnly yet kindly,

"William, let us both begin life again, and together."

He raised his eyes, and watched her sadly; he saw that she had been weeping, and he found it easy now to shed a tear; and he took her hand, and held it for a little while.

"You must give up all this money, William," she continued slowly. "My income is small in comparison with what yours was, but my money was honestly come by, and it is enough for us both."

Mr. Thompson began to consider this proposal; and, in order that his wife might not

know that he was engaged in calculation, he looked hurt, and then covered his face with his hands. If he accepted the offer, he could go abroad with his wife and live in safety; but then he would have to sacrifice the esteem of his fellow-men, and to associate with foreigners, broken-down merchants, and unsuccessful swindlers. He remembered that his wife had spoken of the income as hers, and he feared that she would now insist upon having the management of this money, which was settled upon her for her sole use



"WILLIAM, LET US BOTH BEGIN LIFE AGAIN, AND TOGETHER."

and benefit, and depended upon her frail life.

"Your words prove to me that you are sincere in these strange notions which you have adopted," he said hoarsely. "I am sorry for it, and I pity you. The trials which you have suffered, and the excitement to which you have been exposed, have caused your mind to dwell upon a single idea, until at last you are unable to drive away the illusion."

"I wish I could wash away guilt," she said, looking at him piteously.

"Woman!" he exclaimed. "there is no guilt here, except yours, in deserting me in distress!"

He looked at her sorrowfully, and then glanced at the revolver expressively.

Her eyes followed his, and she saw the weapon; but she had no fear of his using it against himself.

"You do not want that," she said calmly, "and I will take care of it for you."

"I have had enough of life, and now I must die," he answered.

"No, William," she replied, "it is not true. No man can afford to waste the time allotted to him here, and you have still to work out your repentance. I am the only person who has heard your confession, and I shall not betray you; but you must give up your ill-gotten wealth, and humble yourself before God."

"If you leave me now, every one will know that you think me guilty," he urged. "You promised to love, honour, and obey me, and you will not desert me now in my distress."

"No, William," she answered, "I will not desert you; but we must both begin a new life, and embrace humiliation."

"I want to be a great man, and I cannot live without pleasure," he said, bitterly.

"We can attain no great happiness by catering to our own narrow pleasures," she answered. "We cannot all be great, and those, perhaps, are not the greatest who are held in the highest esteem. You are not an outcast, though you have sinned, for God will rejoice at your repentance; and I, your wife, will respect you, when you are able to conquer your own selfish passions."

The auctioneer resented her tone of authority, and she thought with dread of the wifely duty which she owed to this man. Pity and fond regret had taken the place of love in her heart; she knew that there could be no real union between them, unless he would repent; and the memory of the wasted past, and thoughts of the wretched future, were a heavy burden for her to bear. She was ready to forgive her husband and to espouse his sorrow, to mourn with him and not to reproach, and to turn from evil and to seek with him the path of righteousness and repentance. But he still preferred the glory that man could bestow to the forgiveness of God; and when she left him, each understood that, though they were to sit at the same board, their hearts were to be wide asunder.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE.

THE murder of Philip Thompson was by many persons considered one of the most cruel and deliberate crimes ever committed; and the exercise of the prerogative of mercy, excited much public and private comment. Dissatisfaction was expressed at the uncertainty of the sentences of the courts of justice, and at the still greater uncertainty as to whether capital punishment would be inflicted; and it was said that there was one penalty for the rich, and another for the poor.

William Thompson, however, had been par-

doned; and he boldly reclaimed his seat on the Board of Aldermen. But he was not allowed to resume the duties of the office, and he estranged his friends without attaining his object. He then offered himself as a candidate to the electors of his old ward, and was defeated by a large majority; he refused to bind himself not to deal with his late father's estate until the trial of the action in the Probate Division of the High Court; and he told his solicitor that he would not leave London.

He made a grandiloquent speech at Exeter Hall, and promised to subscribe two hundred pounds to the fund for affording spiritual consolation to the natives of Fiji. When he announced his intention of making this munificent donation, there were deafening cheers; but many of those who had flocked to see the notorious criminal, and who had listened attentively to his moral platitudes, believed that he was guilty.

Having thus gained the goodwill of a considerable part of his audience, he referred to the trial through which he had passed; and he boasted that, in answer to his prayers, a special providence had intervened to save him from a fate which he had never deserved. There was a hostile murmur in the room, which he rightly understood to come from those who doubted his innocence; and a way occurred to him by which he might possibly convince the religious persons there assembled.

In his most solemn tone, looking upwards, and folding his hands as if in prayer, he called upon God to strike him down if he were guilty of either forgery or murder.

But he had scarcely begun this appeal, when he remembered how quickly the reprieve had followed his prayer in the condemned cell; and whilst he was speaking, his head began to ache, and a feeling of terror overcame him. He fancied he heard a hissing sound, and it seemed to him that the vast hall was filled with angry demons; he thought he saw the spirit of his brother advancing towards him, accompanied by a ghostly hangman who carried a rope; and he shrieked aloud, and then fell down, violently convulsed. He foamed at the mouth, gnashed his teeth, and bit his tongue; his eyeballs rolled, and his respiration was laborious, and his face, which had been pale as death before the paroxysm, was now flushed.

The superstitious in the audience thought that it was a judgment of God upon the sinner; and the awe-stricken assembly at once began to disperse. But in less than ten minutes the paroxysm ceased, and then a young surgeon accompanied the unfortunate man to 9, Gloucester Grove, where the patient was put to bed. In the morning, the guilty man was better; but his mental faculties were impaired, and he afterwards suffered habitually from depression.

Mr. Thompson was seriously alarmed by his physical condition; and he determined to pay a visit to Dr. Glover, the great authority on epilepsy and other chronic convulsive diseases. He had been told by his family doctor that epilepsy seldom terminated fatally, but the ex-

alderman doubted both the skill and the veracity of his physician. He found that his memory was impaired, and that his ideas were often confused; and several times a day he suffered keenly distressing sensations, which caused him more pain than the graver epileptic attacks. His body was weak, his limbs were feeble, and his gait was unsteady even when he had not been drinking; and there were many other disagreeable symptoms, which made him fear that the great specialist would pronounce him incurable.

When he arrived at the house, he was shown into the waiting-room, where there were several patients and physicians; and he looked at some of the wretched victims of this disease, and wondered whether he would ever be like them. He noticed a man who was paralysed, and he remembered that his motor powers were generally enfeebled. Then an imbecile attracted his attention, and it seemed to him that there was something in the youth's face which was strangely and horribly familiar to him. A great dread took possession of his mind; and he feared that he would become a victim of paralysis, or, still worse, of insanity.

When Mr. Thompson was told that the doctor was ready to see him, he was apprehensive of the result of the interview; and he suffered a transient loss of consciousness, which, however, was without conspicuous convulsion. The attack only lasted a few seconds, but after the momentary insensibility, he suffered from palpitation of the heart, which was attended by severe pain.

Dr. Glover asked several questions, and then examined Mr. Thompson carefully. When the doctor had made his examination he looked grave; and his patient was alarmed.

"It's nothing much, is it?" Mr. Thompson asked abruptly. "My doctor told me that epilepsy was seldom fatal," he added. He was resting his elbows on his knees and his head upon his hands, and the room seemed to be going round.

"I cannot deny that this is a serious case," the doctor said slowly. "We have, I think, conclusive proof of the existence of valvular disease of the heart at a period considerably anterior to the first attack of epilepsy; and the painful sensation, which you have just experienced, is probably accounted for by the pre-existence of that diseased condition, and by the shock to the nervous system which epilepsy naturally causes."

"What is likely to be the consequence?" Mr. Thompson asked.

"There is not likely to be any immediate consequence," the doctor answered slowly, "and I think I might venture to say that your heart will probably last your time, if you will only carefully follow my advice." The doctor said this doubtfully and apologetically; for he wished Mr. Thompson to understand that there was danger, though he was anxious not to frighten his patient.

"What do you advise me to do?" Mr. Thompson asked.

"Well, you must be abstemious, and you

must not excite yourself. Quiet and rest are absolutely necessary, and I should not be doing my duty if I did not warn you that you are at present in a very regrettable condition."

The doctor wrote a prescription, and advised Mr. Thompson to return in a week, accompanied by his usual medical attendant; and then he accepted his fee, and bowed his patient out. Mr. Thompson was assisted to his carriage, and he could never afterwards recollect exactly what took place at the doctor's house. Whilst he was asking the doctor's advice, he was excited and nervous; and, when he was on his way home, he tried in vain to remember what the great specialist had said. He was afraid that he had not long to live, and he thought of all the crimes which he had committed, and for the time he truly repented of his sins.

Soon after his arrival at his town house he had another epileptic paroxysm, and this left him still less strength than before. But after giving up wine and spirits for a day, he resumed the use of them, in spite of the remonstrance of his medical attendant; and his intellect became weaker, as his physical powers decreased. His wife was with him at Grosvenor Grove, and she tried to persuade him to follow the doctor's orders; but he could not be induced to resign the source of his only pleasure.

Mrs. Thompson nursed her husband carefully; but he was no longer her master, and he yielded to the wishes of his wife and of his solicitor, and made an agreement, by which all his property was vested in trustees until the hearing of the cause. His business had fallen off, and this was now sold to the promoters of a joint-stock company; and Haversing Hall was let furnished, and Mrs. Thompson took a small house at Torrington.

The butler asked to be kept on until he could find a comfortable place.

"I don't like this law business," the man said. "It begins all right, but you never knows where it's going to end. Life's a doubtful affair enough, but you do know that it's sure to land you in the grave; whilst if you once get afloat on the law, you're on a ocean of perplexities, and you can't see no shore."

"I was pressed into it," Mr. Thompson answered.

"My uncle was pressed into the service of 'is country, and in the end 'e lost 'is 'ead, which was taken off clean by a cannon. In law one loses one's 'ead, too, but by more complicated instruments; and after all this confusion the country air will blow the legal cobwebs out of our brain. If I stay 'ere the other side will get hold of me, and they'll badger me until they make me doubtful as to whether I ever had any doubts about that painful case. Do you twig, sir?"

The butler laughed, but his master remembered with regret that he had made the fellow a handsome present soon after his liberation, and he had not the courage to send his servant away at once.

"I'm going with you, sir," the butler continued. "I'm an old servant, and I won't take my discharge. There are some gentlemen's gentlemen as would never have taken to a commercial family; but I'm not a aristocrat. I believe in that equality which will spring from the Conservative party and Tory democracy, who are, in a morganatic way, wedded to one another, as I aptly remarked to my fellow-gentlemen at the Haverin' Arms the other evenin'."

"What's the upshot of all this?" Mr. Thompson asked.

"The decoction to be drawn from this, my dear sir, is that I've taken the family for better or for worse; and I'll rally round them to protect their 'earth and 'ome in the hour of their distress. People may try to lead me away by palaver and grandiloquent verbosity; but I've sworn on your side, and I'll never desert my party, as long as I'm paid to stick to my affidavit."

"I didn't expect this devotion, and I don't know how to appreciate it," the master replied grimly.

"You didn't expect to find a British 'eart under a butler's bosom, but it's there for all that," the man answered.

"I don't know how I can repay you," Mr. Thompson gasped.

"Oh, you needn't trouble about that. In moving, there'll be never so many trifles as you won't want to take with you," the butler replied.

The murderer did not want to have a second person near him who was certain of his guilt, but he feared everybody now, and had not the courage to set the fellow at defiance. As to the butler, he seemed puffed out with pride and elated with wine; and, as he walked away towards the servants' hall, he looked as if he could do heroic deeds, if ever the rights and privileges of his class should be attacked.

Soon after this, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson occupied a house on the hillside, whence they could look down at the pretty winding Torridge, gurgling over the stones as it speeds upon its way past green and wooded banks. Nature, however, had no charm for them; happiness had long, long gone out from the poor woman's life, and her husband now found his only consolation in drink.

The pardoned criminal tried to obtain a place in the society of this country town, and when he had made the acquaintance of the vicar, the doctor, the solicitor, and a few other persons, he persuaded his wife to give a party.

Mrs. Thompson was spending a considerable part of her income in charity, and she desired to take no part in the usual pleasures and festivities. But her husband, who had nothing to do, was becoming an habitual drunkard; and she acceded to his request, in the hope that he would have less temptation to seek oblivion in vice, if he associated with some of the townspeople.

The solicitor's wife, who, on account of her pride and her claim to superior knowledge, was known as Lady Jane Grey, haughtily declined

the invitation, and this woman induced the other ladies to follow her example. She lent the numbers of the *Times* which contained the account of the alderman's trial to several persons, and she persuaded many of the townspeople that Mr. Thompson was certainly guilty. Only a few gentlemen and the doctor's wife accepted the invitation, and soon afterwards the wretched man was blackballed when he sought admission to the Conservative reading-room and the club.

Mr. Jones wrote to his client in Torrington that there was no chance of preventing probate of the earlier will, unless the witness Mary Smith could be found or identified; he stated that if the case came on for trial the judge would probably direct the public prosecutor's attention to certain unpleasant facts; and he suggested a compromise as the best means to prevent another criminal trial. To this suggestion the guilty man gladly agreed, and the greater part of his wealth was consequently abandoned; and he told his wife that all his arrangements had been frustrated by trivial incidents which could not enter into a clever man's calculations.

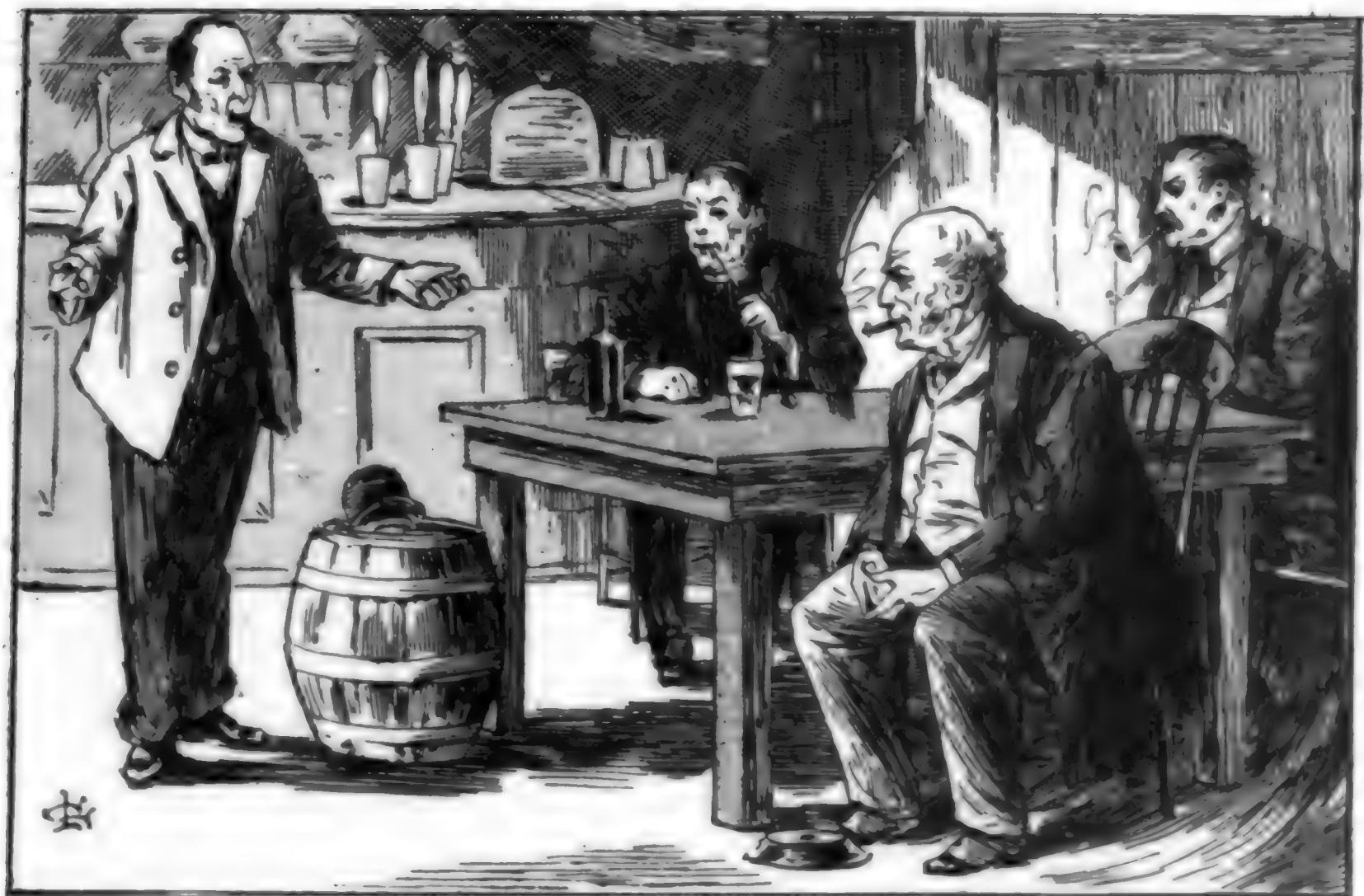
Mrs. Thompson wished to dismiss the butler, who had assumed a domineering tone, and had become the companion of her husband. But William Thompson preferred the man's society to utter loneliness; besides, when he got drunk out of doors, he wanted someone to take him home; and the butler and his master were to be seen every evening at the Rolle Arms, where the man repeated scandals about persons in the highest circles in London, and afforded amusement to the company.

After a few months of this life, William Thompson had a serious epileptic attack daily, and the minor attacks occurred several times during the twenty-four hours. He had no appetite for breakfast, and instead of taking solid food in the morning he put a little brandy into his tea; and a little later he could not walk down the street without assistance. Then the local practitioner, hoping that this warning would make the drunkard abstain from alcohol, told William Thompson that probably a violent paroxysm would some day terminate fatally. He said that the paroxysms would increase in violence, if his patient continued to drink in excess; and that the end might be indefinitely postponed, if his orders were strictly obeyed.

William Thompson was seriously alarmed, and he frightened his wife by telling her that he was about to die. He now stayed at home for a time, and let her nurse him, and he took a little beef-tea, instead of an immoderate quantity of brandy and water. Still, he had not much control over himself; and sometimes he was unable to restrain his desire for rich food and spirits.

His wife's serious face frightened him; and he hated her, because she would preach to him and remind him of death.

Until this time he had always expected to survive his wife, and he could not now bear to think of her living happily after his death.



WILLIAM THOMSON DRANK AND SMOKED, AND DESIGNED TO BE AMUSED BY THE BUTLER.

When he was abstemious, it made him merry to think that, by taking care of himself, he was decreasing her period of freedom; and whilst he followed the physician's instructions, he spent some time every day in writing. But when the bad weather was over, he felt much better; and he was tired of the monotony of home, and laughed at his past fears.

When he reappeared at the Rolle Arms he was determined to enjoy himself. He drank and smoked, and deigned to be amused by the butler, who he now discovered could sing a good comic song. The evenings passed quickly, and when it was drawing late he always drank tumbler after tumbler of brandy and water. The spirit was very different from that which he had been accustomed to take at Romford, and when the butler took him home he could never walk without assistance. His physiognomy and bearing were now altered for the worse; his lips grew thicker, and his features became coarser; and he acquired a hideous expression of countenance. The seizures followed one another in unusually rapid succession, and he was a prey to a constantly advancing disease of the mind, which dooms its victim either to death or to complete imbecility.

Meanwhile, in Keppel Street, mourning had reigned since the death of Philip Thompson; and Lily had resigned her part, and no longer appeared upon the stage. Dick was with her; and, though he was wretched himself, he tried to comfort her. But she would not be comforted; and, for a time, the tyranny of grief usurped the place of love. She did not speak crossly to her cousin, or blame him for his father's crime; but she looked at him sadly, and he feared that his presence reminded her constantly of the past.

Love has its sufferings, and Dick became acquainted with them; but Lily had abandoned herself to grief, and it had deprived her of courage, and even of the wish for recovery. She thought often of her father and of her mother; and when she did indulge in hopes of happiness, it seemed to her that she was doing something daring and wrong. But after months had passed, though Lily wept still, she wept more tranquilly; and in time she began to look forward hopefully to their future meeting, instead of looking back regretfully at their sad parting.

Dick was trying to re-write his uncle's novel, which his father had destroyed; and Lily assisted him. In her possession there were many pages which had been re-copied; there were the outlines of the chapters and a few paragraphs of the work in note-books; and Lily remembered several of the best passages, which her father had read to her more than once. When this novel was finished, Lily proposed to go back to the stage. "It was my father's wish that I should not pass my life in idleness, Dick," she said. "I have been idle long enough, and now I must go and work, and you shall distribute my gains to the poor, as he desired."

Dick drew himself up; the crisis had come at last, and it was necessary for him to speak. Still, it was difficult to find words, and for some time he was silent, gazing fondly at the lovely face of his fair cousin.

"Lily," he said at last very gently, "there was another wish of your father's which has not been fulfilled."

"Yes, Dick," she said, and he did not know whether the words were used as a question or if she only meant to acknowledge the truth of his assertion.

"I am almost ashamed to tell you, since, if you were to marry the son of your father's murderer, many persons would consider you disgraced. But I love you, Lily, with my whole heart and with my whole soul; and whatever your answer may be, I shall love you still."

"Your father's shame is not yours, Dick," Lily answered. She was very pale, but as she spoke a blush rose upon her cheek, and the young author thought that there was not a prettier girl in the whole world.

"You are the dearest and the best of women," he said, "the best and dearest."

Innocent love flowed from her fond heart, a pure smile was on her fair face, and a glance of unutterable tenderness, sympathy, and pity, came from her blue eyes; and Dick saw these signs of love and purity, and worshipped her.

"I will do my best to make you happy, dear Lily," Dick said. He was surprised by the prospect of his happiness, and his eyes were more eloquent than his tongue.

"You have made me happy already," she answered. "It was my father's wish—but I was a silly girl—I had to wait for you to speak." The pretty pink flush spread itself over Lily's fair face, as she bent towards him; and then again she thought of the dead.

"If only my father were here now," she said sadly; and her eyes were looking absently out at the window, when the pressure of Dick's hand and his beseeching voice recalled her thoughts to her present joy.

"Your mind lingers apart from our love, my darling," he said, "and you must try to forget the cause for regret, if you would play your part well in life."

She looked at him a little while in silence, and then the sorrow vanished from her eyes, and they beamed with gladness. "I do not wish to forget my father," she replied. "But I must endeavour to remember that he is happy

now, instead of calling to mind the suffering which he endured upon earth."

"During the last few months I was afraid you had ceased to love me as a girl should love her future husband," Dick said. "And in consequence of the disgrace which the world thinks I should bear, I did not deem it right to ask you for more than a sister's kindness and affection."

The desire which poor Philip Thompson had expressed on his death-bed, had caused a reserve on Lily's part towards Dick; and for this, fortunately, there was no longer any necessity.

"There are some truths which women can never acknowledge," Lily said, "and I could not tell you that I was ready to keep the promise, which we both gave my father. But I have always loved you, Dick, from the first moment when you asked me for my love, and my heart is now all yours."

When Miss Treherne entered the room a few minutes later, the little maiden's eyes were beaming with the light of love, and Dick's face was brighter than it had been for very many days. The actress had a sudden perception of what had happened, and her kind heart rejoiced at the happiness of the young lovers, as she congratulated them heartily.

The manuscript was sent to Mr. Paternoster, and the publisher saw Dick. He said that the novel was not as good as the one which Mr. Philip Thompson had written; but he offered one hundred pounds for the copyright, and this sum Dick gladly accepted.

Soon afterwards the wedding took place; and the sun shone down upon the heads of the young couple, as they knelt at the altar. There were only a few persons in the church beside the officiating curate and the marriage party; there was no display of wealth to attract the attention of the passers-by; but Dick's "I will," was earnestly spoken, and Lily's response came fluttering up to her lips from her heart.



CHAPTER XXIX.—THE END.



STX

anxiously watching the man whom years before she had promised to love, honour, and obey. Dick, who had arrived by the evening train, was waiting below. He had come at his mother's bidding, but he had not yet seen his father, and he was wondering whether he would be called upon to forgive or to be forgiven.

Mr. Thompson had, during the past month, become more and more irritable; and at times he had been so violent that it had been necessary to place him under restraint. During his maniacal excitement he had cursed his son, his niece, and his dead brother. He had made an attempt to kill his wife with a knife which he had concealed, and by his cries he had prevented everyone in the house from sleeping. He had explained to the doctor that the many pages of foolscap, which he had written since he had been at Torrington, were parts of his will; and he had wished to write his signature with his own blood, and to have this witnessed by two friendly demons who he said protected him from the Evil One.

Mrs. Thompson, as she sat by her husband's side, could not help thinking of the freedom which she would enjoy, if the epileptic *acme* should terminate fatally. Recovery was now hopeless, and life to the patient could only be a continuous struggle with disease. Still, she felt ashamed of herself for having wished to be a gainer by her husband's death; but though she tried, she could not truly desire that his life should be indefinitely prolonged.

There had been no epileptic attacks for three hours, but the madman was shrieking and groaning, and from his ravings it seemed that his weary brain was recalling some past scenes of his misspent life. A trained nurse, who had been several years in a hospital, had hastened away in horror and affright, and two strong men were in the passage outside the room, ready to restrain the patient if he should again become a dangerous lunatic.

Mrs. Thompson was weak with watching and weeping, but she would not yield either to the entreaties of others or to her own desire to

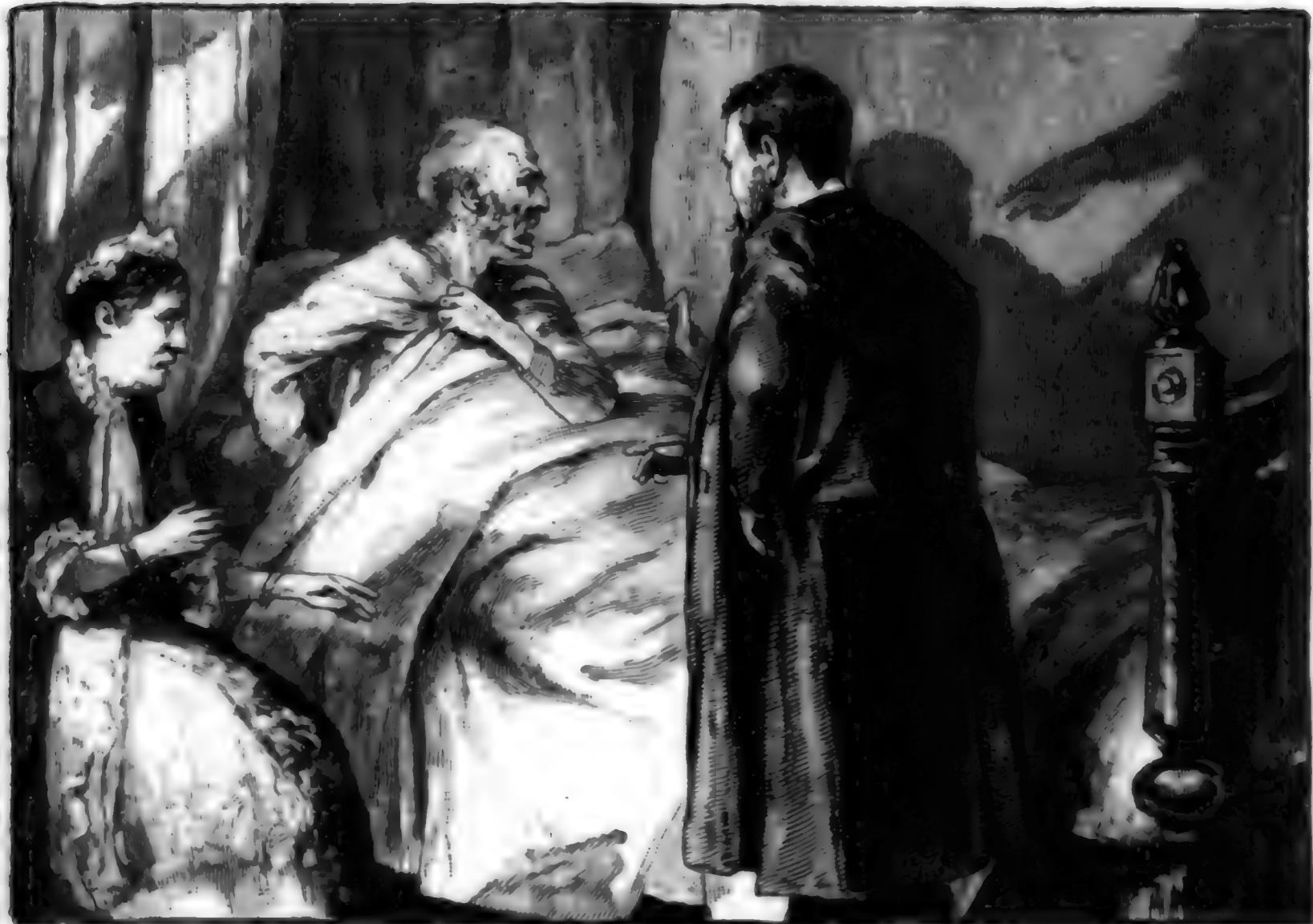
leave the room. Her love was dead, but she was determined to do what she deemed her duty. She was nervous and excited; and she thought that taking the place of the hired nurse, was some atonement for refusing the love which she owed to the vile murderer who was her husband.

The fire had now become a glowing mass; the shaded lamp lit up a narrow circle, and left the rest of the room in sombre gloom; and the patient was quieter, and the doctor was bending over him.

Mrs. Thompson saw the grotesque figure on the wall, which looked black and threatening. It startled her at first; but she soon saw that it was only the doctor's shadow. She looked at her husband, and she saw him raise himself a little in bed and gaze at the wall. Then, as the doctor put out his hand, it seemed to her that the larger shadow was about to seize the smaller, but more distinct form of the murderer. She tried to restrain herself, but in spite of her endeavours she could not help uttering a little cry of alarm. Her husband repeated this, and he began a maniacal struggle with an imaginary foe, which lasted until death put an end to the contest. Then



MRS. THOMPSON THREW THE PAPER INTO THE FIRE.



THE GROTESQUE SHADOW ON THE WALL SEEMED ABOUT TO SEIZE THAT OF THE DYING MAN.

the doctor took from under the pillow a packet addressed to Mrs. Thompson, and led the widow from the room ; and when Dick saw his mother's face, he knew that there was something else upon its flight besides the wind and the clouds.

"Dick," she said, when the doctor had left them, "I believe there was a time when your father never thought of anything cruel or base ; but he wished to accumulate great wealth, and he longed to gain the approbation of others. He did not mind what steps he took to raise himself above his fellows, and he was guilty of falsehood and crime ; but though he sinned thus in order to escape from poverty and obscurity, he failed in his endeavours. What temptations he suffered we cannot tell ; what we, who have committed many sins and have omitted many duties, would have done in his place, we cannot say ; and so we should not judge him."

Dick did not answer ; he pitied his mother, but he had already judged and condemned the dead. He waited a little while, and then he advised his mother to go to bed. But Mrs. Thompson had never asked her husband how much of what had been said against him was true, and how much was false ; and she was hoping to learn that he had not been as guilty as she had deemed him. She told her son that she wished to read the contents of the packet, and then she showed him to his room.

Mrs. Thompson soon returned to the library ; and she at once opened the packet, which contained a will written, though not signed, by the deceased. But it was no ordinary will

which the poor woman had before her ; and when she had turned over several pages, she knew that her husband had written this paper in order to become notorious for his infamy, since he could not become famous for his good deeds.

The crimes which the murderer had committed were set forth plainly ; and though he did state that he left all his property to charitable purposes in order to atone in some measure for the evil which he had done, yet he seemed proud of his guilt, for he boasted that he had broken every commandment more than once.

According to his statement, he forged the will whilst his father lay in need of assistance ; and he and Samuel Soper had left the offices, knowing that the sufferer would be certain to die, if help did not soon arrive. He said that he saw his first wife directly after her interview with his father, and that he let her leave him, knowing that she was about to commit suicide ; and he acknowledged that he had deliberately planned the murder of his brother.

A deep sigh broke from his wife when she had finished reading. She feared the law, as most women do ; and she did not remember, or was not aware of the fact, that the paper was of no value, as it had not been signed by the deceased. Still, she deemed it her duty to destroy the will. She hesitated a moment, and then threw the papers into the fire ; and at once they began to smoulder. After a little while a small flame arose, which increased in size and strength ; but it soon grew less, and then it flickered, and at last it died out—like human life.

Mrs. Thompson was shocked by this reflection, and though she was a Protestant, she prayed for the soul which had passed away. Old memories, too, came back to her mind ; and they made her think of what she might have been, if she could have lived her life over again. Thought succeeded thought in quick succession, until at last she pondered on the question of the forgiveness of sins. Her husband had been very vile, and he had treated her most cruelly, and she knew not whether she could forgive him from her heart.

She took a candle in her hand, and went to the dead man's room. There the body lay, but the soul had sped to the seat of judgment ; and her husband's face no longer bore the harsh look, which she had seen there so often of late. She was no hypocrite, deluding self with false arguments ; and it was not easy for her to banish the bitterness from her heart. But she prayed that this strength might be given unto her ; and before she left that room, she had touched the cold forehead with her lips ; and she forgave, as she herself hoped to be forgiven.

Far away from the quiet town upon the hill, another woman was working out her repentance. Mrs. Soper had left the London Fever Hospital in disgrace, and she had settled with her husband in a mining village of the Black Country. It was not a pleasant place for a residence ; but the nurse sought a sphere of usefulness, not a peaceful retreat. Amongst the miners she could be useful ; and when she had been there a little while, the men and women always sent for her, whenever anybody was ill.

Samuel Soper, finding that by his folly he had lost a fine figure-head of a woman and the money which he had settled upon her, endeavoured to recapture both. The little man's attempt, however, was not entirely successful ; for the would-be conqueror became a captive, and worked under his wife's command, whilst she spent his income for him. At first she hoped to make Samuel a preacher, and, to humour her, he declared that he had a call ; but this, Mrs. Soper learned afterwards, was only from a congregation at a public-house for a comic song. In consequence of this deceit, his pocket-money was reduced ; and, in her endeavour to make him of use his wife taught him how to

bandage, and how to give immediate help to the wounded.

The little man was very fond of his wife, who had forgiven him for the past ; but sometimes he got drunk to show his independence, and occasionally he flirted with a miner's wife or daughter. When he was drunk, a miner carried him home ; when he flirted, one of the women was sure to report the fact to the kind nurse who did so much for their comfort : and in any case the offender had to do penance. His lady-love frowned upon him ; and then he said that the canker-worm was eating away at his heart, and that only by kisses could what was left of this organ be preserved from the ravages of his consumer.

Once, when it seemed that his charmer's anger could not be appeased, he threatened to commit suicide ; and, having purchased a pocket-knife for sixpence from a Cœap Jack, he wrote a last dying farewell, and then felt the edge of the weapon. But a drop of blood came, and drove all his courage away ; and he went to



MRS. SOPER GAVE SAMUEL A BOX ON THE EARS AS A COUNTER-IRRITANT.

his wife for a piece of sticking-plaster, and told her what had caused the painful wound. Though she gave him a box on the ears as a counter-irritant, she did not sympathise with him in his sorrow; and after this the little man determined to bear the ills of life, as best he could. He gave up the flower in his button-hole, and became very humble; and after eighteen months of matrimony, it must be acknowledged that he presented rather a melancholy appearance.

Lily and Dick are very happy, and they live on in the house in Keppel Street. Miss Treherne is with them, and she has many pupils. Lily has appeared on the stage again, and Dick is writing essays, novels, and tales. The fortune which they have received under their grandfather's will, makes no difference to them, for they consider that they hold this money in trust for the poor. Even in the comparatively rich quarter of the town in which they dwell there are very many who suffer from want, and amongst these Lily and Dick labour.

Dick does not desire to be a great man; but he does good work, and some measure of greatness has been thrust upon him. Dick's writings have obtained for him a greater reputation and a much larger pecuniary reward than Philip Thompson ever obtained; but he thinks he would be able to do better work as a legislator than he can as a writer, and he

acknowledges that his literary ability is inferior to that which his uncle possessed. But the best men do not always draw the greatest prizes in the lottery of life; and Dick says that the critics are less severe now than they were twenty years ago.

Marriage is the beginning of a new period; it is not the end of a life's history. Lily and Dick are alive, working away amongst us; and we cannot tell what the future will bring. Miss Treherne regrets that there is not a little one to call Lily mother; Dick longs to be in Parliament, to make the rich grant justice to the poor; Lily wishes to see all men and all women happy and good; and Mrs. Thompson is looking forward to that future life in which, she trusts, all guilt may be blotted out, and all sins forgiven.

It is Christmas evening, the snow is falling fast outside, the bells ring out a merry peal, bearing unto mankind a divine message of goodwill; and Lily, Mrs. Thompson, Miss Treherne, and Dick, gather round the bright fireside, having done all they can to alleviate the sufferings of the distressed. The young couple are very happy, and they possess an affinity of nature, founded on the love of the same ideal. Lily is endowed with a great power of loving, and Dick says that his attachment is stronger than life, and lasting as death.

FINIS.





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